



General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

63rd plenary meeting

Wednesday, 24 November 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Crown Prince Albert (Monaco), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 22 (continued)

Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal

Draft resolution (A/54/L.26)

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): I would like, at the outset, to express my pleasure at the great number of countries that joined in sponsoring the present draft resolution, which shows the importance that the international community places on the Olympic ideal.

The great challenge now is to take the first practical steps towards turning into reality the observance of the Olympic Truce during the Summer and Winter Olympics, starting with next year's Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia. The Olympic Truce is an expression of the yearning of mankind for peace, understanding and reconciliation and for the noble notion of distinction based on honest competition. In the search for excellence every athlete is equal, and victory is the result of ability, training, hard work and perseverance. Discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, sex or other characteristic is incompatible with the Olympic spirit.

It is important to strengthen adherence to Olympic ethics, especially the need to conduct the Games in a fair way. In this context, the efforts against the use of prohibited anabolic and other drugs are to be commended.

Cyprus, a small country, has since its independence followed an active foreign policy based on the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, which coincide with and fully adhere to the Olympic ideals. The latest manifestation of our determination to become a bridge of peace in our sensitive region in the eastern Mediterranean and a homeland of harmony and understanding for all communities living on the island is the proposal of President Clerides for the demilitarization of Cyprus. On this solemn occasion, we renew our appeal for the acceptance of this proposal, so that Cyprus will be able to participate in the next Olympics as a reunited and peaceful State.

The people of Cyprus felt immense satisfaction over the decision of the International Olympic Committee concerning the hosting of the Olympic Games in Greece in 2004, the birthplace of the Olympic Movement. We interpret this decision as an appeal for a new beginning and as an expression of the collective will of mankind to make the twenty-first century a period of serious efforts for peace and the advancement of social progress and prosperity.



The twentieth century, which is approaching its end, has seen two world wars, ideological antagonisms, regional and local conflicts and the policy of ethnic cleansing. It is hoped that human rights and the respect of international law will be the norm of the day in the new millennium.

I would like, in conclusion, to express our appreciation for the great efforts of the International Olympic Committee in imbuing youth with these ideals, which is a guarantee of a better and more humane world.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): First, I wish to express the deep sympathy of neighbouring Croatia to the Italian people and the bereaved family on the passing of Amintore Fanfani, the former Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy. He was a true statesman.

Also, may I express the pleasure of Croatia at seeing His Serene Highness presiding over this meeting.

There are few issues that bring virtually all Member States of the United Nations together as does the one that we are considering today: the Olympic ideal. The principles upon which the modern Olympic Games were developed by Pierre de Coubertin are of lasting import to mankind. It is only appropriate, therefore, that given the commonality between the Olympic ideal and the goals of the United Nations, it has become an established practice for this item to be included in the agenda of the General Assembly session preceding each Olympic year.

The fundamental principles of the Olympic charter speak of placing sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity. In the pursuance of these aims, the Olympic Movement — whether acting unilaterally or with other organizations — strives to contribute to a peaceful and better world, free of discrimination. At the same time, the strivings of the United Nations Organization, as set out in its Charter, include, *inter alia*, the maintenance of peace and security, the development of friendly relations among nations based on the principles of equal rights and self-determination and the achievement of international cooperation. It is clear that the two institutions, each in their own way, seek to achieve humanity's most noble and honourable goals.

As a relatively new country born during turbulent times, Croatia has a particular affinity for the values of the Olympic ideal. While a war of aggression was being waged against it, and after it had received international recognition

only some months prior, Croatia participated with distinction at the Barcelona Olympic Games. The symbolism of joining the family of nations through becoming a member of the United Nations and soon thereafter participating in the Olympics was of special significance in those trying times. Both remain wonderful, moving events in the history of my country.

We look forward to the continued development of joint endeavours between the Olympic Movement and the United Nations across the spectrum of United Nations activity. By working together on the areas of common interest, Member States will contribute to the achievement of the goals of both institutions. While Olympism is dominated by the symbolism of sportsmanship, solidarity and the promotion of mutual understanding, it can also make a very concrete contribution to a better and more peaceful world. To this end, the practical cooperation between the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee in the health, environmental, humanitarian and cultural fields represents the beginnings of mutually fruitful initiatives.

Sport can indeed serve diplomacy. The coming together of athletes from all over the world helps us to see that we are not so dissimilar as human beings — that although we may come from different cultural or religious traditions, we all have similar hopes and strivings.

Croatia welcomes the efforts of the International Olympic Committee in launching an appeal for an Olympic Truce and hopes that it will be respected in all areas of conflict around the world. The draft resolution before us — which, *inter alia*, urges Member States to observe the Truce — represents an important, tangible contribution of the Olympic Movement to the most important goal of the United Nations. Cooperation between the two organizations on this issue, therefore, is only right and proper.

Finally, Croatia is convinced that the Games of the XXVII Olympiad, to be held next year in Sydney, Australia, will make a significant contribution to the attainment of the goals of the Olympic ideal. We welcome the initiative of Australia to have this draft resolution introduced by Mr. Daniel Kowalski, a man whose sporting achievements reflect the Olympic spirit and who is a credit to his country.

Mr. Dugan (United States of America): The United States delegation supports the positive role that sports can

play towards achieving a peaceful and better world. In particular, it believes in the Olympic ideal and encourages those who work daily — the athletes, coaches, families and organizations — to make that ideal a reality.

The United States delegation has co-sponsored the Assembly's adoption of five previous resolutions in this vein and enthusiastically joins consensus today again for building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal. Today's text makes Assembly history. At 180 co-sponsors, it is the most co-sponsored draft resolution ever. If the United Nations were to award gold medals, this initiative would receive one.

Today's draft resolution enables the Assembly to underscore the fact that good sportsmanship promotes a worldwide culture of peace, tolerance and understanding, particularly among young people. We as Member States set a powerful example for the youth of the world today in swearing the Olympic Truce.

Our statement was to have been made by Mr. Irwin Belk, a businessman and philanthropist who is serving on the United States delegation to the fifty-fourth session of the Assembly as a public delegate. Unfortunately, he was unable to be here this afternoon and sends his regards. He wished me to share with the Assembly that at 78 years of age, he continues to be enthusiastic about sports being for all people, young and old. One of the purposes of public delegates, according to Eleanor Roosevelt, who established the tradition, was to bring directly the perspective and experience of the American public to the Assembly's considerations on matters that affect us all.

Apart from having attended all Games of the Olympiad since 1960, Mr. Belk has had the privilege to serve the United States Olympic Committee for over 30 years. This has been in addition to serving on the boards of many institutions of higher learning throughout the southern United States. In marrying together those two interests, he has endowed many colleges and universities with athletic field houses, competition track facilities, university buildings, and he has funded athletic programs and student scholarships. For example, on the campus of East Carolina University, he contributed to the establishment of the L.T. Walker International Human Performance Centre, named for the past President of the United States Olympic Committee, Mr. Leroy Walker. The Centre is unique in being more than a training facility. It provides foreign Olympic athletes and coaches the techniques and knowledge to take home to improve an entire sports programme. Such programmes across the

United States and around the world support the goal of Olympism, which is to place everywhere sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.

Another good friend of Mr. Belk was Mr. Jack Kelly, past President of the United States Olympic Committee, the son of an Olympian gold medalist — and an Olympian silver medalist himself — and the beloved uncle of our Acting President. Mr. Kelly was a champion of Olympism, and it is indeed a testament to the Olympic spirit that sport can build friendships and bridges across the miles and over the years. The United States delegation is happy to note that you, Sir, as an Olympic athlete and an International Olympic Committee member, still keep the tradition of the family.

In anticipation of today's meeting, the draft resolution was shared with members of the United States Olympic Committee. They wish us well here today. Education through sport is only half of the Olympic philosophy; it is also education through culture. This combination of sport and culture is what establishes the ideals of peace in the minds of men, women and youth.

Last June's conference, organized by the International Olympic Committee and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), made a solemn appeal that education for a culture of peace through sport become a priority action at the international, regional, national and local levels. Throughout the United States sport and education indeed go hand in hand. International action is promising as well. The recently established International Olympic Forum for Development, in which the United States participates, also is unifying different organizations toward their shared goal — to make physical education and sport for all a reality.

The United Nations increasingly attests to the unifying power of sport. The day before the New York City Marathon, 12,000 runners from abroad gathered on the lawn of the United Nations for a rally and friendship run to Central Park. This year the Foreign Minister of Germany, Joschka Fischer, participated as a contestant, and we congratulate him and the German delegation to the United Nations on his competitive spirit and sportsmanship. Also, the United Nations flag is flying over more and more sporting venues, and the Secretary-General himself recently attended the Women's

World Cup in soccer and also threw out the opening pitch at the recent baseball World Series in the United States.

Today's appeal for peace under the Olympic Truce is a solemn moment for us all. It is essentially a humanitarian action. On this closing point, let us take note of the Olympic Movement's many humanitarian activities to promote, through sport, the quality of life and well-being of those living in the most disadvantaged parts of the world. There are children in refugee camps, in displacement, in onerous labour conditions, in war, in conflict, in severe poverty or in urban violence. The Olympic Movement, through its International Cooperation Department, has taken several initiatives in organizing activities to overcome idleness and boredom; to teach those children fair play, tolerance and understanding; and to build friendships, all in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme, among others. This cooperation has been encouraged by Assembly resolutions since 1994. It is a story that is not often told, and yet it is at the core of building a peaceful and better world through sport.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for Argentina to participate in the consideration of item 22 on the Assembly's agenda, entitled "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal" and to co-sponsor the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.26, introduced by the representative of Australia.

The large number of co-sponsors attests to the importance that the international community attaches to the Olympic ideal as a tool for promoting peaceful international relations. This also augurs well for observance of the Olympic Truce during the upcoming XXVII Olympic Games, to be held in Sydney in September 2000.

The United Nations appeals to the parties to conflicts to suspend hostilities during the holding of the upcoming Olympic Games and urges all States to abide by the Truce, both individually and collectively, and to strive to settle their disputes peacefully.

Argentina would like to associate itself with other statements congratulating the International Olympic Committee on its work, and encourages that body to continue to pursue its initiatives and programmes designed to use the Olympic Truce as an instrument for promoting peace and dialogue in areas of conflict.

The Olympic ideal, which is based on a spirit of tolerance, fellowship, understanding among peoples and the dignity of human life, extends beyond the area of sport into everyday life, allowing for free cultural exchange and for greater cooperation.

The Olympic ethic allows no form of discrimination. In the quest for excellence, all athletes are equal and triumph is no more than the result of skill, training and perseverance — a reward for personal dedication and effort, with no other gain than the prestige of the country that the athlete represents.

Sports are part of the life of all peoples, and competitions encourage nations to lay aside their differences and enhance cultural and personal exchanges. In a world threatened by hunger, unemployment and violations of human rights, sports can become a valid tool for mitigating the adverse effects of these problems in the most sensitive groups in society. As models of society, athletes have a prominent role to play in preventing drug abuse and urban crime. In this context, Argentina stresses the importance of operative paragraph 3 of the draft resolution, which provides for the use of the Olympic Truce as an instrument to promote peace, dialogue and reconciliation, even beyond the period the Olympic Games, thereby bringing the Olympic ideal closer to the objectives of the United Nations Charter.

Argentina supports the establishment, under the International Olympic Committee, of an International Olympic Forum for Development and an International Centre for the Olympic Truce designed to promote peace and human values through sport and the Olympic ideal.

My delegation would like to call attention to the integrative function of sports in a variety of areas of real life. In the area of peacekeeping operations, it is a tool for the reintegration of ex-combatants; in the field of social education, it is a way of promoting the reintegration of those social groups that have been marginalized; and in the domain of environmental protection, it is an effective way of ensuring that people can live in harmony with their surroundings, thereby bringing an aspect of sustainable development into the realm of sports education.

Finally, my delegation would like to wish Australia, the host country for the next Olympics, every success, and reaffirm its support for the draft resolution we are considering.

Mr. Zmeevski (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Sport and peace are concepts that are not only related but part of one organic whole. An essential condition for competition on the playing field is the absence of war on the battlefield. Sport brings people together; its inherent rivalry is not a clash between foes, but a competition between partners and colleagues who are like-minded in their shared quest for perfection.

The role of sport as an ambassador for peace is particularly important when it is hallowed by the noble traditions of the Olympic Truce. Today we are all capable of assessing what is urgently needed to educate future generations in the spirit of a culture of peace, non-violence and tolerance. It has been repeatedly shown that the ideas of ancient Greece are not outdated, but with the passing of time they resonate with new and greater relevance than ever. The Olympic flame must illuminate the way forward for humanity into the third millennium; it must be a beacon that lights the way to a world without enmity and violence. It is important that we acknowledge that today, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, and as the international community steps out of the old and into the new world order.

In June this year, President Boris Yeltsin put forward an initiative promoting a common effort to develop a concept of peace for the twenty-first century. The goal is to create a new culture of peace in which the highest priority for peoples and individuals is a world without wars and conflicts. One of the components of that concept could be the establishment, at the international and national levels, of conditions in which peace could be established and maintained by sport, among other things.

We consider it to be profoundly symbolic that the year 2000 — the first year of a new millennium — declared by the United Nations as the International Year for the Culture of Peace, is also an Olympic year. This coincidence increases our awareness that sport and peace are links in the same chain. They are Ariadne's thread, which will lead us back out of the labyrinth of today's dramas and tensions and into the light. Certainly, the Olympic ideal is one of the key elements.

Russia is an active participant in the Olympic Movement and aware of its powerful potential as a force for peace. Many Olympic cities throughout the world have clear memories of our athletes — not only of their victories and records, but of the spirit of openness and honest competition and the warmth and ties of friendship that they established. In 1980, Moscow had the honour of hosting

the twenty-second Summer Olympic Games. It was an unforgettable celebration for ten of thousands of foreign guests and tens of millions of people in our country, for it was the first time we had ever carried the Olympic baton as host of the Games. To this day the memory of that event remains fresh in Russia.

In July 1998 Moscow greeted Olympic participants from the whole world, this time youthful representatives of various countries. This was a Moscow city government initiative, with State support. The capital of Russia was the host, under the patronage of the International Olympic Committee, of the first-ever World Youth Games. More than 7,000 young athletes from 131 countries participated. This event, unusual in Olympic practice, prompted a worldwide response, and not only in sporting circles. We believe that the idea of the World Youth Games is worth serious consideration and should be developed because of the enormous educational significance of the Olympic ideal, whose most promising followers are young athletes. It is possible that a form of the Olympic Games for young people might become one of the further developments of the Olympic Movement in the twenty-first century.

In September 2000, when the leaders of all countries will join here together at United Nations Headquarters in New York for the Millennium Summit and Assembly to consider plans to strengthen peace, in Sydney the torch of the twenty-seventh Olympic Games will be lighted. In this way, both here on the East River and in the stadiums of Australia, although in different ways, the goals of strengthening peace will be determined. We sincerely wish every success to the organizers, whose declared goal is achieving harmony through sport at the Olympic Games. We are confident that as we stand on the threshold of a new millennium, the ideals of peace, demonstrated through the Olympic Games, will blaze with new glory. The Russian Federation is proud to be a sponsor of the draft resolution now before us.

Miss Durrant (Jamaica): It my pleasure to address the Assembly today on agenda item 22, entitled "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal".

The Olympic ideal mirrors the fundamental objectives of the United Nations in seeking peace and understanding among nations and peoples. Indeed, the presence of the flag of the United Nations at all Olympic events is a testament to the shared vision of the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee.

The Olympic games remain a shining symbol of our continuing quest to test the limits of human endeavour. Even more, the Olympic spirit embraces the valuable tenets of fair play and the importance of teamwork, diligence, commitment and hard work.

We thank the delegation of Australia for introducing draft resolution A/54/L.26. As we prepare to meet the challenges of peacemaking and peace-building in the new millennium, it is fitting that the United Nations should devote special attention to the goal of building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal. In keeping with that goal, the United Nations, through General Assembly resolution 48/11, revived the ancient Greek tradition of the Olympic Truce, which calls for all hostilities to cease during the Games. The ancient nature of this tradition is a significant reminder that countries have traditionally seen the value of sport as a catalyst for peace.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in conflicts motivated by racism, xenophobia and intolerance. The Games and the spirit of the Olympic ideal, are intended to promote friendship, mutual understanding and cooperation among the nations and the peoples of the world.

For these reasons, the Government of Jamaica supports the call for the reaffirmation of the Olympic Truce during the Games of the XXVII Olympiad, to be held at Sydney in September 2000. We also support the reaffirmation of the Truce prior to each Summer and each Winter Olympic Games.

Jamaica has had a rich tradition of excellence in the field of sports since the 1940s, when our track and field greats captured the imagination of the world, at a difficult time immediately after the Second World War. That tradition has lived on, and today Jamaica is regarded as a foremost sporting nation in a number of disciplines. Perhaps the one in which we have been able to win the greatest number of accolades for our performance is in the area of track and field. These performances have helped to create a visibility, admiration and respect disproportionate to Jamaica's demographic and economic size.

It is a miracle, even to Jamaicans, that, with limited financial resources, equipment and formal training, many of our young people have risen to become world-class athletes. Many have used their talents to assist with their education, and all have recognized the value of sports, particularly community sports, for the stability of their communities and of the world.

In many communities in Jamaica, people set about creating their own facilities and sports teams and organizing tournaments, fully understanding the power of sports to foster peace and counter juvenile delinquency. In its national youth policy, the Government of Jamaica has taken decisive steps to recognize the link between sports and cultural activities and the growth and development of our young people.

The Government has recognized the fact that sports can be a vehicle for preparing young people for life. The construction of sports facilities has therefore been a major focus of the Jamaica Social Investment Fund, which supports community-based projects. The fund, created in 1996, has already approved the construction of several mini-football stadiums as well as community basketball and netball courts.

The benefits which have accrued to Jamaica as a result of its participation in various sporting activities, including the Olympic Games, are real and substantial. For this reason, my delegation is proud to be a sponsor of draft resolution A/54/L.26, entitled "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal".

Mr. Boisson (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): For the Principality of Monaco, a sponsor of draft resolution A/54/L.26, interest in sport is as deep-seated as our interest in art and culture. This has given rise to the creation of major sporting events such as the Herculis meet and the Monaco International Marathon, which passes through the territories of three States: France, Italy and the Principality of Monaco. Despite its small size, my country is home to many internationally-recognized sporting associations and federations, which make an important contribution to disseminating the true Olympic spirit, especially among Monaco's young people.

Monaco is also the headquarters of many international sporting associations. The General Association of International Sports Federations, founded in 1967, encompasses more than 75 sporting bodies, international federations and associations. Since 1968, the International Association for Non-Violent Sport has been working to promote the cultural and educational functions of sport by speaking out against doping, chauvinism, cheating — in a word, against all forms of rejection of the Olympic spirit.

The Union International de Pentathlon Moderne, the International Amateur Athletic Federation, the World Confederation of Boules Sport, the Association of Tennis Professionals Tour Europe and the International Powerboating Union all have their headquarters in Monaco.

To help ensure that our young people are imbued with sport and its values, the Government of the Principality is striving, *inter alia*, to promote sports in schools from the very earliest age by teaching physical education and swimming. To that end, all schools built over the past two decades are equipped with sports facilities including gymnasiums and, sometimes, swimming pools. The Louis II stadium complex gives priority admission to students whose schools are not yet adequately equipped.

Secondly, we are promoting mass sport by enabling young people to engage in the greatest possible number of sports. In the Principality there are more than 70 different sports, and the Government of Monaco generously subsidizes the relevant groups to help them function properly.

Finally, we are encouraging competitive sports by creating first-class facilities. Sport classes are scheduled so that athletes, particularly young athletes, can balance academic and sporting activities. And especially talented young people can get financial assistance to help them reach their goals.

Today's debate demonstrates the determination of the international community to encourage all efforts to promote Olympic values, respect for one's opponents, and friendship among peoples. We are most encouraged by support for the Olympic Truce and by the appeals made in that connection to belligerent parties during the Summer and Winter Olympic Games. Here, it is important to recall that cooperation between the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee gained a new and very important dimension in 1993 with the General Assembly's adoption at its forty-eighth session of a resolution by which it revived the ancient Greek symbol of the Olympic Truce.

It was in 1994, in Lillehammer, that this very positive initiative was implemented for the first time. Ever since that memorable date, the United Nations, with the very valuable support of the Secretary-General, has repeatedly encouraged the endeavours of the International Olympic Committee — in 1995, then again in 1997 — by adopting resolutions recalling the original goals of "a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal".

In February 1998, on the occasion of the eighteenth Winter Games, held in Nagano, Mr. Kofi Annan and the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, Mr. Hennadiy Udoenko made a solemn and moving appeal for a suspension of conflicts, stressing not only the symbolic but also the very tangible value of that initiative.

Allow me also to recall the contribution that the International Olympic Committee has been making to the United Nations Development Programme to promote activities in support of the fight against poverty and social marginalization. Athletes at the twenty-sixth Olympic Games held in Atlanta in 1996, widely supported the worldwide appeal against poverty. Some of them became involved in events at the national or regional level during the week dedicated to the issue of the eradication of poverty, which was part of the Decade dedicated to this theme by the United Nations.

Among other missions to which the International Olympic Committee is very much committed, one might cite those designed to strengthen inter-ethnic understanding, as well as those conducted jointly with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in the form of pilot projects, notably in Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Ecuador and Tanzania. Other cooperative projects linking the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee should also be highlighted, such as those entered into with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Nepal, Ghana, Kenya, Guatemala and Tanzania. The same applies to the initiative launched by the International Olympic Committee in the Balkans last March to assist refugees from Kosovo.

On a very regular basis, the Olympic Committee is also working together with the United Nations Environment Programme — for example at the World Conference on Sport and Environment and various regional gatherings on this issue.

The Committee has also been involved with the United Nations Drug Control Programme by organizing an international conference on this issue, as well as through travelling photo exhibits and a round table. This cooperation is, of course, representative of the International Olympic Committee's unflagging commitment to fight doping. The World Conference on Doping in Sports, held in February 1999, also marked an opportunity for close cooperation between these two institutions. The creation of the World Anti-Doping

Agency, based in Lausanne, Switzerland, near the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee, further testifies to the existence of the necessary international determination to fight this scourge effectively.

Initiatives and actions by the Olympic Committee since the General Assembly considered this same item two years ago show clearly the interest that the Governments of many countries attach to developing and strengthening Olympic activities and to international cooperation in this realm, which leads to better understanding among athletes everywhere. Our world Organization must unreservedly encourage these initiatives and actions, which represent a significant contribution to rapprochement and peace among people.

In conclusion I should like to pay tribute to a great sportsman who has just passed away, a man who devoted his life to the development of athletics, first in his own country, Italy, then at the global level, starting in 1981, as President of the International Federation of Amateur Athletics, headquartered in Monaco. President Primo Nébolio passed away on 6 November 1999 at the age of 76. He will leave his profound imprint on the history of sports, reflecting an exemplary career that he began as a long-jump champion and that he pursued at the university level and then worldwide. Indeed, he was the architect of the International Federation of University Sports, whose presidency he held for a long time. In 1992 he became President of the Italian Athletics Federation, an office he held for over 20 years, thus holding both national and international offices, since he was also a highly valued member of the International Olympic Committee.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

We shall now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.26.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt the draft resolution?

Draft resolution A/54/L.26 was adopted (resolution 54/34).

The Acting President: We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda item 22.

The President took the Chair.

Agenda item 41

Zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/447)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.35)

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Argentina to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.35.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I take great satisfaction in introducing, on behalf of the members of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.35.

Ever since its establishment in 1985, the zone has been a forum for discussion and an arena for building closer cooperative ties and friendship among the African and Latin American countries that border the South Atlantic. Argentina takes pleasure in noting the strides made towards the attainment of the goals established 14 years ago and the flexibility shown in adapting to changes that have occurred in the world since the end of the cold war. It is our view that the zone has been a success because it has allowed countries with differing social and cultural make-ups to give tangible expression to their common goals of peace, social and economic development and environmental protection, within a context of respect for pluralism and diversity. The ongoing vigour and validity of the zone is reflected in the fact that thus far we have held five high-level meetings, the last of which took place in Argentina in October 1998.

In the realm of peace and security, my country takes the view that nuclear-weapon-free zones such as those envisaged in the Treaties of Tlatelolco and Pelindaba, by establishing areas where the use or threat of use of such weapons is prohibited, contribute to the attainment of the goals enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

As regards illegal arms trafficking and the proliferation of small arms, the countries of the zone are convinced that we must promote the establishment and maintenance of peace and limit as much as possible the extent to which human and economic resources are diverted to weaponry. A clear demonstration of this conviction is the invaluable cooperative initiatives undertaken in recent years by American and African countries.

Given that one of the goals of the zone is the peaceful, negotiated settlement of existing disputes, my country urges all States to act in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant United Nations resolutions by focusing their efforts on peacefully, justly and definitively resolving all pending disputes in the South Atlantic. Argentina wishes to once again reaffirm its conviction that the goals of peace and cooperation that are at the heart of the zone can be attained only through the full exercise of representative democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the countries of the region. In this context, we view with satisfaction the progress that has been made this past year towards establishing and consolidating good governance and transparency at the regional level. In addition, my country believes that issues involving peace and development are interdependent and inseparable. This explains the importance of our fostering investment and technical, economic and commercial cooperation among the members of the zone. For this reason, we view with satisfaction the progress made by the member States in attaining economic stability, modernizing State administration and opening their markets.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea establishes a regulatory framework for protecting living marine resources. However, some of the Convention's provisions need to be complemented by those in the Fish Stocks Agreement, which was adopted in 1995 and whose entry into force is essential.

Another issue to which Argentina would like to draw attention is the transportation of irradiated nuclear fuel, plutonium and high-level radioactive wastes. In this connection, I wish to express the concern of my country and of other South Atlantic coastal States about the risks entailed in the navigation of vessels carrying such wastes.

The fight against drug trafficking and other related crimes requires a concerted effort on the part of the international community. In this regard, Argentina reaffirms its readiness to cooperate to attain the objectives that the zone set for itself at Somerset West in 1996 and in Buenos Aires in 1998.

As regards international humanitarian assistance, I would like to stress the progress made under the "White Helmets" initiative, which was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly in 1994. Within the zone, the White Helmets have assisted communities as diverse as those in Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Equatorial Guinea and Sierra Leone, among others.

I cannot conclude without expressing our appreciation of the generous offer made by the Republic of Benin to host the sixth high-level meeting of the members of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic.

Allow me to refer briefly to several technical aspects of the draft resolution. First, I would like to add to the list of sponsors the delegations of Cape Verde and Equatorial Guinea. I thank for the valuable support they provide by co-sponsoring the draft resolution.

With the goal of improving the quality of the text, and after having engaged in the relevant consultations, I would like to propose, on behalf of the sponsors, two oral revisions to operative paragraph 10. These procedural revisions do not alter the content of the paragraph; they are designed only to emphasize that the parties must fully implement the Lomé Peace Agreement.

The first proposal is to change a few words in the third line of operative paragraph 10. Currently, in the English text, these words are

(spoke in English)

"to commit themselves to the full implementation of the Agreement".

(spoke in Spanish)

This would be amended to read,

(spoke in English)

"to implement the Agreement fully".

(spoke in Spanish)

Similarly, I propose that the order of the next to last and the last phrases of operative paragraph 10 be inverted, so that the reference to the President of Togo, to the Economic Community of West African States and to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sierra Leone appears right after the phrase referring to the Lomé Agreement.

If I may, in order to make this clearer I will read what the revised English version of operative paragraph 10 would be. It would now read as follows:

(spoke in English)

"Also welcomes the signing of the Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front, in Lomé on 7 July 1999, calls upon the respective parties to implement the Agreement fully; commends in this regard the President of Togo, and the Economic Community of West African States, together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sierra Leone, and all those involved in facilitating the negotiations in Lomé, on their contribution to this achievement; further welcomes the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1270 (1999) of 22 October 1999 on the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone".

(spoke in Spanish)

I would also like to highlight that in operative paragraph 18 a word has been left out which was in the text that the sponsors submitted. I would therefore like to draw delegations' attention to the fact that in the third line of that paragraph, after the word "States", the word "and" needs to be restored, so that in English the third line would read as follows:

(spoke in English)

"account the interests of coastal States and in accordance with the United Nations Convention".

Having made those points, let me thank the Assembly for its patience and ask the delegations gathered here, mindful of the noble objectives we are pursuing in the zone, to support the adoption of draft resolution A/54/L.35, as orally amended.

Mr. Esaw (Togo) *(spoke in French)*: Fourteen years after its creation, it is clear that the international community now considers the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic to be a valuable mechanism that provides its members with a framework for joint action aimed at achieving the shared goals of peace, economic and social development and environmental protection. The General Assembly's annual consideration of this item and the broad-based support for the resolutions adopted under it bear witness to the positive contribution that the zone can make to the task of implementing the principles and purposes of the United Nations.

The delegation of Togo, which associates itself fully with the introductory statement made by the Permanent Representative of Argentina, cannot fail to congratulate the Secretary-General for the report he has submitted for our consideration in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/34. We note with satisfaction that specific action is being taken in the United Nations system, eloquent proof of the tireless support that the Organization has always offered to the States members of the zone in order to help them fully to implement our goals.

It is now quite clear that the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic offers immense potential that could be put to good use by the United Nations in its unflagging efforts to build a world of peace focused on development. As a priority framework for cooperation between 24 African and Latin American countries on the Atlantic Ocean, the zone has extended its field of action to issues as basic and varied as the promotion of peace and security and the protection of the environment and marine biological resources.

My delegation considers, however, that if we are to achieve a significant level of efficiency, the efforts of States members of the zone should focus on the priority areas of disarmament, protection of the marine environment and its resources and combating drug trafficking. Moreover, the areas of activity I have mentioned were amply covered by the Final Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the fifth meeting of the States members of the zone in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 21 and 22 October 1998.

With respect to nuclear disarmament in particular, it is good to note that the zone already has important international instruments to promote the denuclearization of the South Atlantic. The adoption of the Tlatelolco and Pelindaba Treaties was another milestone towards the achievement of that objective. Furthermore, the prospects for a nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere is no longer a pious wish, given that the denuclearization of the South Pacific through the Treaties of Rarotonga and Bangkok is proceeding along precisely the same lines. In this respect, I wish to point to the recent activities of the Department for Disarmament Affairs concerning the zone, which are aimed at hastening the entry into force of the Treaties of Tlatelolco and Pelindaba and will certainly contribute to the achievement of their goal.

With respect to small arms and light weapons, their destabilizing effects in the zone hardly need be pointed

out. It can never be stressed too firmly that the distribution of small arms and light weapons is largely responsible for igniting armed conflict and a catalyst of transnational organized crime and drug trafficking. That is why my delegation wishes yet again to highlight the need for the United Nations to increase its assistance to the States members of the zone in these areas, particularly through the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme and the Bretton Woods institutions.

In this context, my country welcomed the convening by the Department for Disarmament Affairs of two seminars on the illicit circulation of light weapons under the auspices of the United Nations Regional Centres for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and Peace and Disarmament in Africa. Through the head of the Togolese delegation at this session of the General Assembly, we have already expressed our unwavering support for the decision of the United Nations to convene an international conference on all types of illicit weapons trading.

With regard to transnational organized crime and the traffic in and use of drugs, the cooperation emerging between the members of the zone should continue to be supported by the joint action of the international community. In this respect, we welcome the work under way to draft a convention against transnational organized crime and would wish to see the ad hoc committee established to that end achieving concrete results as soon as possible.

My delegation also believes that the protection of the environment — the marine environment in particular — is of special importance to the members of the zone. Because of their inability to adequately guard their maritime area, which is linked to their low level of technological development, the States of the zone are powerless to deal with harmful activities carried out in their maritime area, including the dumping of radioactive and toxic waste and illegal fishing, which is often carried out by vessels sailing under two flags.

The member States of the zone, without doubt, are aware that they are primarily responsible for taking the appropriate measures for the regulation of the transport of dangerous waste and the intensification of information exchanges regarding fishing fleets that frequently plunder the Atlantic.

Nevertheless, there is an important role to be played by the United Nations system in the framework of solidifying the objectives of the zone concerning these particular aspects. The need for the international community to support, through concrete actions, the member States of the zone in the pursuit of their efforts for the creation of a future secure area, a condition *sine qua non* of sustainable development, is clearly reflected in draft resolution A/54/L.35, of which my country is a sponsor and which was just introduced to us by the representative of Argentina.

Togo hopes that this draft resolution will enjoy the broad support of the General Assembly, as have corresponding resolutions in the past.

Mr. Preware (Nigeria): I wish to express the appreciation of the Nigerian delegation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and insightful report on this agenda item. The zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic has been recognized by the international community as a valuable mechanism that provides the 24 countries from the two shores of the South Atlantic with an important framework for concerted efforts in the pursuit of the common goal of peace, social and economic development and protection of the environment.

The Nigerian Government attaches great importance to the issues of peace, security and development, as set out in the Final Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the fifth ministerial meeting, held in Buenos Aires in October 1998. The Final Declaration correctly identifies the priority targets of denuclearization, conflict resolution and combating illicit drug trafficking.

Member States of the zone seek a South Atlantic free of nuclear weapons. The Treaties of Pelindaba and Tlatelolco represent a significant move towards the realization of that goal. Brazil's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) means that all States in the zone now subscribe to this very important Treaty. These Treaties, as well as those of Rarotonga, Bangkok and the Antarctic have turned half of the globe into a nuclear-free zone. This is a welcome development. Tremendous progress has also been achieved in recent times in the efforts to prevent the dumping of radioactive and hazardous waste. We therefore call upon the nuclear-weapon States to respect the desire of the peoples of the southern hemisphere to keep the threat of nuclear weapons out of their zone.

My delegation is pleased with the progress made in the zone in fostering regional peace and cooperation through enhanced understanding and political and socio-economic contacts. We take great satisfaction in the progress made in the past year in the resolution of some conflict situations in our zone which would have posed continuing threats to peace and stability. We are pleased that in our part of the zone in Africa we have seen the restoration of peace and democracy in Sierra Leone and in Liberia, where the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) subregional Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) played a most significant role. The signing of the Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front was certainly a most welcome development. We now call on all parties to this Agreement to abide by their commitment and to effectively and fully implement the Agreement. The establishment of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) is a landmark development in the search for durable peace in the subregion. Nigeria stands ready to play an active role in UNAMSIL to facilitate implementation of the Lomé accord.

We note the commitment of the provisional Government of Guinea-Bissau to hold legislative and presidential elections soon, and we call upon the provisional Government, as well as member States, to support the economic reconstruction and consolidation of democracy in Guinea-Bissau.

Nigeria remains concerned at the increase in drug trafficking and money laundering in our zone. The perpetrators of these illegal activities penetrate and corrupt administrative structures of Governments and financial institutions, all to the detriment not only of national economies but also of the moral fabric of society. Nigeria has been a victim, but it is determined to rid itself of this plague. It will continue to support international efforts to eliminate the related scourges of drugs, money laundering and corruption. We wish to register our appreciation for the tremendous assistance Nigeria has received from the United Nations Drug Control Programme in the formulation and implementation of our National Drug Control Master Plan. The effort is already yielding very positive results. The level of success already achieved is evident in the fact that a growing number of drug traffickers now deliberately avoid Nigerian ports.

Member States of the zone are conscious of the dangers posed to the peace and security of the region by the proliferation of small arms. Nigeria welcomes the adoption in November 1997 of the Inter-American

Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials. The decision taken at the last summit of the Organization of African Unity reinforces the commitment to fight the proliferation, circulation and illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons.

We also welcome the initiatives by ECOWAS to conclude an agreement on a moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of light weapons. Nigeria is taking practical steps in the fight against the proliferation of illegal arms. Some of the measures already taken include entering into bilateral agreements with contiguous States to check illicit traffic in small arms, the inclusion of locally manufactured weapons in the licensing of small arms and the maintenance of a register of manufacturers that includes local arms producers.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express once again our appreciation to the Government of Argentina for hosting the high-level meeting of the zone in Buenos Aires in 1998. We would also like to thank the Argentine delegation, as well as other members of the Bureau of the Permanent Committee of the zone in New York, for their efforts in coordinating the various activities.

Mr. Moura (Brazil): My delegation attaches great importance to the adoption by the General Assembly of a draft resolution on the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic.

This annual exercise reflects the recognition by the international community of the zone as a valuable mechanism which provides the 24 countries from the two shores of the South Atlantic with an important framework for concerted efforts in the pursuit of the common goals of peace and development.

The support received by the General Assembly resolutions on this initiative is indicative of the fact that the zone's relevance is not limited to its member States, but that it has a significant impact on the promotion of the objectives of the United Nations.

Brazil believes that, among others, there are three areas in which the zone's potential can be promptly put to use: denuclearization of the region, protection of the marine environment and cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking. There can be no doubt that the goal of complete denuclearization of the South Atlantic region is achievable. The Treaties of Tlatelolco and Pelindaba

already provide a basic frame of reference for this endeavour. With Brazil's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), all member States of the zone are now parties to this Treaty. The zone constitutes another building block, together with the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Pelindaba, Rarotonga, Bangkok and the Antarctic, to the fulfilment of the objective of a southern hemisphere free of nuclear weapons.

Brazil understands that the creation of new mechanisms regarding the protection of the marine environment, within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, would greatly contribute to the prevention of accidents and would promote the exchange of information and cooperation. The programmes developed by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization represent an important instrument for promoting cooperation among the countries of the zone in that area.

The fight against drug trafficking is another objective to be actively pursued. Brazil is convinced that coordination of efforts within the zone can be decisive. Agreements among South Atlantic States, as well as multilateral activities, such as the anti-drug initiative launched at the fourth ministerial meeting, held in South Africa, are instrumental in fostering the effectiveness of actions undertaken against this form of organized crime. In this context, we welcome the follow-up given by the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention.

In order to fully achieve its goals, the zone needs continuing support from the United Nations system, including the United Nations Development Programme and the international financial institutions. The zone's fifth ministerial meeting, held in Buenos Aires in October 1998, once again renewed the commitment of member States to the objectives of the zone. The Final Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at that time set out various modalities of cooperation for the common purpose of ensuring peace, security and development.

Brazil is committed to working with other South Atlantic countries, as well as with the other members of the international community, to implement the targets set in the Buenos Aires Plan of Action, circulated last year as document A/53/650. The Plan of Action encompasses mutually beneficial initiatives that can strengthen cooperation among the member countries, and they should be encouraged.

As stated by the representative of Nigeria, we are also pleased by the progress made in the resolution of some conflict situations in the zone.

We appreciate and welcome the offer of the Government of Benin to host the sixth meeting of member States of the zone.

Finally, like the Permanent Representative of Argentina, who introduced the draft resolution before us, we hope that draft resolution A/54/L.35 will be adopted by consensus.

Ms. Coelho Da Cruz (Angola): It has been 13 years since the zone of peace and cooperation was established, and it has proved to be a forum for dialogue and strengthening of efforts to achieve concrete goals of common interest aimed at promoting South-South cooperation and development among its members.

One of the priorities of peace is denuclearization and demilitarization. Accordingly, our countries are seeking to transform the South Atlantic into a nuclear-weapon-free zone. We support the full implementation of the Pelindaba and Tlatelolco Treaties and the coordination of efforts to promote cooperation between the two continents, as well as to find the best ways and means to put an end to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to the illegal trafficking of small arms and light and conventional weapons. We continue to support the international mine clearance efforts.

Due to the fact that some members have had to devote their energy almost entirely to endeavours to settle their internal conflicts and to achieve national reconciliation, a number of decisions were not fully implemented, particularly regarding the fight against the trafficking of small arms and light weapons, combating drug trafficking, the protection of the marine environment and illegal fishing activities.

As regards my own country, five years have passed since the signing of the Lusaka Protocol between the Government and UNITA. However, the main tasks in attaining a lasting peace have not yet been achieved, in particular the complete disarming of UNITA and the restoration of State authority in the illegally occupied areas. Also, the intransigence of the rebels led by Mr. Jonas Savimbi in respect of fully honouring their obligations, preferring to take power by force, has plunged the country into a new cycle of violence. Mr. Savimbi is still interested in continuing his

destabilizing process of preventing the smooth running of democratic institutions; destroying cities, towns, villages, infrastructure and public and private assets; and mercilessly killing civilians, thereby condemning all the people of Angola to misery, disease and famine.

As a result of these actions, in addition to the thousands of civilians who have been killed, almost 3 million others have left their original areas in search of shelter in the Government-controlled areas. Those communities require humanitarian assistance by the international community.

Taking into account the great number of refugees and displaced persons, the Government is engaged in a national programme of humanitarian assistance, and it appeals to the international community to continue to provide and increase assistance to the neediest sectors of the population with a view to promoting their resettlement and reintegration into the production and development process.

The current economic world situation is a cause for great concern for developing countries, and it is vital to seek and to foster new forms of international economic cooperation based on a partnership with reciprocal gains for all the participants. It is within this framework that the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic stands out as the only regional forum for dialogue and closeness between the African and the Latin American countries that wish to strengthen their economic, trade, scientific and technical cooperation without any constraints or unilateral decisions.

Protection of the marine environment, preservation of South Atlantic living resources and efforts against narcotic traffic are also areas of cooperation to which our countries are giving priority.

Considering the lack of adequate resources to fully implement all those endeavours, my delegation strongly appeals to the specialized agencies of the United Nations and relevant organizations to give appropriate assistance to Member States.

The member States of the zone urge all Member States to vote in favour of draft resolution A/54/L.35.

Mr. Amehou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): It is a most agreeable duty for me to take the floor on behalf of the delegation of Benin in the debate on the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic.

Before continuing, my delegation would like to congratulate the Secretariat on the report contained in document A/54/447, which contains very useful information that I am sure will add substance to our discussions.

My country, the Republic of Benin, welcomes the establishment of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, which is a valuable mechanism providing 24 countries on both shores of the South Atlantic with an important framework for action and for concerted cooperation, sharing as we do the goals of peace, economic and social development and the protection of the environment.

My delegation would like to take this occasion to congratulate the Government of Argentina on having hosted the fifth ministerial meeting in Buenos Aires, on 21 and 22 October 1998, which adopted by consensus a Final Declaration and Plan of Action, which is a very important document for our Organization.

The Declaration stresses the determination to increase cooperation in fields where our interests coincide, such as preserving fishing resources, developing trade, investment and technical cooperation, conserving our freshwater resources and drafting suitable regulations for the transport of radioactive waste by sea.

The zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic must be spared an arms race, and above all it must remain free of nuclear weapons.

In this respect, the delegation of Benin welcomes the existence on the two shores of the South Atlantic of the Treaties of Pelindaba and Tlatelolco, two important frameworks for the denuclearization of the region.

Benin attaches great importance to peace in the zone because peace is the only guarantee for fruitful cooperation between Member States.

However, we have to note that our organization still has to face conflict situations, even within the territory of some of its member States. This is caused by intolerance and long-standing political intransigence on the part of forces opposed to lasting democratic development in our countries, and is compounded by major concerns in connection with the phenomenon of globalization.

But in the post-cold-war world and given the phenomenon of globalization, which is marked by

interference of interests and clashes of interests, the challenges we must meet to safeguard peace and prosperity for humanity are more than ever challenges that we must all face and deal with together.

This is eloquent proof, if any were needed, that the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic is worthwhile, both as an instrument for South-South cooperation and as a forum to promote peace and international security.

My delegation would like to appeal to all member States of the zone to support the processes of peace and reconciliation under way in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Through our joint efforts, we must restore peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea. If it is to fully achieve its goals, the zone needs continuing support from United Nations bodies, particularly the United Nations Development Programme and the international financial institutions.

Finally, I should like to reiterate, on behalf of the Government of Benin, the commitment we made at the third ministerial meeting of members of the zone, held in Brasilia in 1994, to host in Benin the sixth ministerial meeting of our organization. Benin hopes to benefit from the support and experience of countries that have previously hosted meetings of the zone and from all member States for the holding of the sixth ministerial meeting, which will be the first of the next millennium.

The President: We shall now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.35, as orally revised.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada,

Guatemala, Haiti, Hungary, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen

Against:

None

Abstaining:

United States of America

Draft resolution A/54/L.35, as orally revised, was adopted by 97 votes to none, with 1 abstention (resolution 54/35).

[Subsequently, the delegations of Peru, Slovenia and Tajikistan informed the Secretariat that they had intended to vote in favour.]

The President: I call on the representative of the United States, who wishes to speak in explanation of vote on the resolution just adopted.

Ms. Steele (United States of America): The United States has once again abstained in the voting on the draft resolution on this subject due to our belief that internationally recognized zones should be created through multilateral regional forums and not through United Nations resolutions.

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 41?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.



General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

64th plenary meeting

Monday, 29 November 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Jusys (Lithuania),
Vice-President, took the Chair.*

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 39

**Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of
Governments to promote and consolidate new or
restored democracies**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/492)

Draft resolutions (A/54/L.23, A/54/L.33)

Amendments (A/54/L.46)

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Romania to introduce draft resolutions A/54/L.23 and A/54/L.33.

Mr. Ungureanu (Romania): It gives me distinct pleasure to address the General Assembly for the first time and on an issue of worldwide interest at a time of global change. We are working together at the United Nations, with a common vision and in a spirit of partnership, to promote democratic values and consolidate democracy throughout the world at the dawn of a new millennium.

Today there is an almost universal recognition that the national interests of every country are best served by the

growth of democracy on a global scale. Indeed, democracy favours and fosters political and social stability and economic growth.

Lately, a comprehensive notion of democratization has been emerging: democratization seen as a process — a goal to be achieved — rather than a “one size fits all” model to be imposed.

There is a set of universal values and principles, but each society works within its own context and its unique history and culture.

Many debates have pointed out the so-called democratic peace — democracies rarely go to war against each other — as well as to linkages between democracy and development, including the question of whether a democratic government promotes economic growth more effectively. The concept of good governance is also very much related to democracy.

Recent studies show that in this decade the number of democracies has almost doubled, while the number of armed conflicts has declined. It has been argued that properly balanced development that benefits all groups of society and fosters inclusive democracy is the best form of conflict prevention, offering better chances for escaping poverty.

The experience of countries that consider themselves new or restored democracies, some of them making the transition from totalitarian rule or from centrally planned



economies, others recovering from conflicts, attests to the close relationship between democracy and the requirements of comprehensive development in a peaceful environment. The Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Bucharest in 1997, focused on this critical link between democracy and sustainable development.

Another lesson learned was that sharing democratic values, such as political pluralism, separation of powers, parliamentary democracy, market economy and human rights, is by itself not enough to build a functioning democracy. A coherent network of institutions to serve and implement those values was absolutely necessary. This indissoluble linkage between values and institutions represents the substance of good governance.

We consider that by its scope and legitimacy, the United Nations is well placed to assist interested Governments in their efforts aimed at fostering democratic values and building democratic institutions.

It is in this spirit that the Romanian delegation, together with 44 other sponsors, has submitted a draft resolution on a Code of Democratic Conduct for consideration and adoption at this session of the General Assembly.

In addition to the sponsors listed in document A/54/L.23, the following countries also indicated their wish to co-sponsor the draft resolution: Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Japan, Luxembourg, Nigeria, Paraguay, Poland, San Marino, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The text before the Assembly embodies principles that are widely accepted and spells out practical modalities for carrying them out. They are aimed at consolidating democratic processes through the promotion of pluralism; the promotion and protection of and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms; the strengthening of the rule of law; developing genuine and periodic elections; creating and improving the legal framework and necessary mechanisms for enabling the participation of all members of civil society in the development of democracy; good governance; promoting a sustainable economic environment; and enhancing social cohesion and solidarity.

It is our view that the adoption of such a Code would fit naturally into the ongoing efforts to build upon a system-wide agenda for democratization aiming at enhancing the United Nations capacity to meet the new

challenges with respect to democratization and good governance as part and parcel of the preparations for the upcoming Millennium Assembly.

In the last decade, Romania has come a long way, from dictatorship to democracy, from isolation to integration with Europe and the rest of the world. On the basis of its own experience, my country remains committed to the consolidation of new or restored democracies. We recognize the growing trend indicating that the process of democratization is a global phenomenon and accept that all democracies, both old and new, have much to learn from each other.

The Romanian delegation highly appreciates the report of the Secretary-General and congratulates his staff on the excellent work done. The report looks generally at the efforts of the United Nations in this field and reviews the overall process of democratization and the role that the International Conferences of New or Restored Democracies have played in this global process.

We attach special significance to the activities carried out by the follow-up mechanism to the Third Conference, which held a meeting in Bucharest last May. This innovative mechanism — which brought together Governments, the United Nations system, academia and civil society organizations in an open and transparent way — continued to advance concrete projects, as described in the report, and to plan for the Fourth Conference, to be held in Benin from 4 to 6 December 2000.

We support the idea put forward in the report that, 12 years after the holding of the First Conference of New or Restored Democracies in Manila, and with Africa completing the cycle of conferences to be held on the four continents, it is timely to assess the overall impact of the movement on the process of global democratization. In this respect, we commend the specific recommendations contained in the report.

As it did last year, Romania, the current chair of the international conferences of new or restored democracies, has the honour to submit at this session another draft resolution under agenda item 39, contained in document A/54/L.33. I am pleased to introduce this draft on behalf of the 53 sponsors listed in the document. The following countries have also expressed the wish to co-sponsor the draft resolution: Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Croatia, Germany, Japan, Norway, Portugal and San Marino.

In its preambular part, the draft resolution recalls the main events and documents of the movement of new or restored democracies, reiterates the principles and previous resolutions agreed upon by the General Assembly and takes note of the progress achieved so far in 1999.

In the operative part, the General Assembly would welcome the report and recommendations contained therein and would express appreciation for the work done by the follow-up mechanism.

In a special paragraph, Member States and the relevant specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations, as well as non-governmental organizations, are invited to collaborate in the holding of the Fourth Conference, to take place in Benin in December 2000.

On behalf of the sponsors, I wish to express our hope that this draft resolution will be adopted by consensus.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria to introduce the amendments to draft resolution A/54/L.23 contained in document A/54/L.46.

Mr. Mesdoui (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of China, Cuba, Egypt, Iraq, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Viet Nam and Algeria to introduce document A/54/L.46.

This is the first time that two draft resolutions have been introduced under this agenda item as long as the item has been discussed in the General Assembly. The new draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.23 has given rise to controversy because its sponsors are asking the General Assembly to endorse a set of rules on a very sensitive issue that were drafted outside the United Nations. Those rules have at no time been discussed or studied at the United Nations.

Above all, it has been the procedure followed and the approach taken by the sponsors that have caused problems, particularly since they did not agree, despite our request, to hold consultations or discussions on the matter. All our efforts remained a dead letter and received no response, even though the very spirit of the draft resolution has to do with democracy.

The sponsors of the amendments would like to reaffirm here in the Assembly their strong, total and

unswerving commitment to democracy and the protection and promotion of all human rights. The amendments to draft resolution A/54/L.23 that the sponsors are proposing are therefore essentially an attempt to prevent the General Assembly from departing from its mandate by adopting a text that was drafted outside the United Nations.

I will not go into all the details of the amendments proposed by the group of countries I have mentioned and will confine myself to pointing out that the only substantive amendment refers to the operative paragraph, which would request the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on this issue at the fifty-fifth session. The other amendments proposed are essentially based on the Charter of the United Nations and the Vienna Declaration on human rights. Furthermore, I wish to recall that at this stage none — I repeat, none — of the amendments proposed in document A/54/L.46 relate to the Code of Democratic Conduct.

If the General Assembly accepts this precedent by adopting the Code, in the future nothing will prevent other codes drafted outside the United Nations on other questions, such as disarmament, from being proposed for adoption.

It is for all these reasons that the sponsors, including my country, deemed it useful to submit these amendments. We are convinced that the amendments will enjoy the broadest support, and we hope that in future Member States will respect the rules and procedures that govern our Organization so that we will not be faced with this type of situation again.

Mr. Krokmal (Ukraine): Ukraine shares the prevalent belief that the global process of democratization will lead to the establishment of a world system in which peace and security, prosperity and sustainable economic development will be effectively guaranteed. Such a system should be based on the universal principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The full potential of the democratic process will be achieved only through joint action by the international community that is undertaken with a sense of common purpose and partnership.

Clearly, national actions also remain paramount. Ukraine, which has been dedicated to the principles of democracy from the very first year of its independence,

cannot and will not renege on its responsibilities in the area of democratization. Ukraine has declared its political will to build an open, free and democratic State. Our country has been able to maintain peace and social accord; avoid tensions that have an ethnic, political or economic basis; and secure its national harmony.

The genuinely free and democratic elections to the Verkhovna Rada, or Parliament, of Ukraine and the three presidential elections that have taken place in Ukraine since 1991 underline the fact that we have achieved a great deal in this endeavour.

The most recent presidential election in Ukraine was held only two weeks ago, on 15 November. For countries with established democratic traditions, such elections are important but rather ordinary phenomena. For Ukraine, whose modern history has seen only three presidential elections, this phenomenon lends a democratic perspective to the entire process of the transformation of the economy and society.

As the results of that presidential election indicate, a new and important step has been taken towards the development of democracy and the further strengthening of State sovereignty. The presidential election was another confirmation of the high level of political activity in Ukrainian society and of its commitment to a democratic way of life.

Numerous representatives of Ukrainian non-governmental organizations, political parties and foreign observers contributed to transparency in the elections. On the basis of their observation of the conduct of the ballot, the observers stated that there were no irregularities which could have affected its results. At the same time, international observers noted certain shortcomings of the election campaign, which will be carefully studied in order to avoid them in future elections.

That presidential election greatly contributed to further structuring political life in Ukraine and to strengthening the foundation of the civil society that is taking shape in our country. The results of the presidential election also attest to the fact that Ukraine has successfully passed through a critical stage of its modern history and confirm that it has chosen independence, the course of democratic reform and the creation of a market economy. The election affirmed once again the irreversibility of our democratic choice.

In the process of transforming its society, Ukraine still faces very difficult challenges. The Ukrainian people

realize that an effective response to those challenges depends largely on energetic internal changes affecting most fields of social and economic life. That is why the acceleration and deepening of the reform process is the basis for all our plans. A detailed presentation of these plans will be made by the President of Ukraine, Mr. Leonid Kuchma, in his inauguration speech tomorrow in Kiev. We hope that Ukraine's progress on the road to democracy will enjoy the wide support of the world community.

Our delegation commends the activities of the United Nations system in support of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies. We fully share the views expressed in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/492) and the recommendations contained therein.

We are confident that all Member States will gain through shared experiences and "lessons learned" in their efforts to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies. In the spirit of recommendation 2 of the Secretary-General's report, Ukraine is ready to continue sharing its own experiences in settling inter-ethnic tensions and promoting tolerance towards national minorities. One of the areas in which such experiences could be useful to other nations is the treatment of a very delicate issue related to the return to Ukraine of Crimean Tartars deported during the Soviet totalitarian regime. Today the Crimean Tartars in Ukraine enjoy all the rights afforded by a democratic society and live in peace alongside the other peoples that inhabit our multinational country.

May I also take this opportunity to draw the attention of the General Assembly to the proposal of the President of Ukraine made during the recent summit in Istanbul, held on 19 November, to establish in Ukraine an analytical centre to study the problems of inter-ethnic relations. I am confident that the activities of such a centre would be beneficial to many new or restored democracies.

The process of democratization is a prevailing trend in the development of world civilization on the threshold of the new millennium. I would like to confirm that Ukraine is strongly committed to the principles of democracy and is ready to continue its cooperation with the United Nations in supporting the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): Croatia attaches particular importance to this agenda item, entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies". The international conferences of new or restored democracies are a reflection of a global process of democratization, for which strong support by the United Nations is essential. My delegation therefore commends the Secretary-General for his report (A/54/492) and especially for his recommendations made therein. We also thank the Government of Romania for the efforts they have invested in the follow-up process of the Bucharest Conference.

Democratization is a global process. Participation of citizens in political life is increasing, and the protection of human rights and the rule of law are becoming more effective worldwide. As recently as 25 years ago, less than one-third of the world's countries could be considered democracies. In the late 1990s that proportion has risen to almost two-thirds.

What is the reason for the spread of democracies around the globe? The answer is simple; democracies have proved to be more economically efficient and far more pleasant to live in when compared to alternative political systems. Therefore, whenever and wherever they can, people are choosing democracy and are even willing to fight for it.

Countries cooperating under the name of new or restored democracies have a lot in common. They have similar aspirations, and they are faced with similar challenges. Their conferences and this discussion in the General Assembly are thus an opportunity not only to express mutual support and commitment to this common goal, but also to exchange regional and individual experiences.

The democratic world recently marked the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Indeed, the past decade has witnessed far-reaching changes in Central and Eastern European countries in respect of building and consolidating new democratic systems. In this task, the countries concerned also faced some hardships, especially with respect to the transition to a market economy and competing in the global market.

South-East Europe was faced with additional problems: after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, some of its successor States suffered the war of aggression and all of its consequences. In these circumstances, the process of democratic development in Croatia was severely

hindered, initially by the armed aggression, and subsequently by efforts to reintegrate its occupied territories.

Croatia is preparing for parliamentary elections in early January, the first after re-establishing full control over its entire territory. These are turbulent times when national priorities have to be redefined and when, after security and stability have been achieved, political parties are competing to offer the quickest and safest way to increase economic development and quality of life for all citizens. However important they may be from the perspective of the development of democracy, these elections are not a drama but a major step forward in enriching our experience. What all democracies share, and what we in new or restored democracies are slowly getting used to, is the understanding that whoever wins the elections wins them conditionally — in the sense that limitations arise from the rule of law — and temporarily — until the next elections, when everybody has a chance to win again.

In the belief that Benin will provide the ideal forum to discuss the future direction and priorities of the international conferences of new or restored democracies, my Government is preparing itself to take a more active role in this respect. We are confident that the Benin Conference will provide an opportunity to examine imaginative ways and means to cooperate with other initiatives while simultaneously mobilizing the wisdom of African and all other participating Governments to speed up and widen the process of democratization throughout the world.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): The search for a real democratic society is a never-ending process. Democracy is a normative theory. The ideal, fully accomplished democratic process has not yet been realized. However, the resolution on the promotion of the right to democracy, adopted this year in the Commission on Human Rights, sets forth some fundamental requirements for a democratic society, some of which include freedom of opinion, expression, thought, conscience and religion; freedom to seek, receive and impart information through the media; the rule of law; transparent and accountable government; universal and equal suffrage; and periodic and free elections.

The link between democracy and human rights is self-evident. A functioning democratic society remains the best guarantee that all human rights are respected. Transparent and accountable governmental institutions,

whether national, regional or local, are a prerogative for people's continued confidence in their leaders. The proposed Code of Democratic Conduct represents another important step. The draft resolution is also an important indication of an encouraging trend over recent years by which more and more countries are joining the ranks of democracies. The process towards democracy may be slow and painful. The many new or restored democracies, which are often fragile, need patience, encouragement and, sometimes, international assistance if they are to develop and flourish.

My Government especially welcomes the fact that the present draft resolution and the Code of Democratic Conduct come from an effort by new or restored democracies themselves. The ownership of the process that has thus been established is a guarantee of continued efforts to see the ideas implemented in practice. Norway strongly supports the group of new or restored democracies that have brought forward the draft resolution under consideration. We believe that the upcoming Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, which will be held in Benin in December 2000, will contribute to the continued strengthening of the democratic process, especially in Africa.

Throughout the 1990s, Norwegian development assistance policy has been focused on democracy as an important dimension for sustaining social development. We have supported general and presidential elections, as well as local and regional elections in a number of developing countries. We have helped build capacity and support functions for national assemblies. Support has also been given to mass media, women's organizations and the trade union movement in order to strengthen civil society. We cannot build democracy through such assistance, but we can make a contribution to enabling countries to do so themselves.

One particular challenge in our common efforts to build and strengthen democracy is to mobilize the people in countries where participation in the democratic process is deteriorating, where the institutional framework may be in place but does not function in a way that inspires confidence. In order to achieve a viable working democracy, people must believe that it is worthwhile. Democracy must prove that it serves the common good and that it is responsive to the will of the people. It must allow real participation in which all are equal and in which there are no privileges.

One of the greatest threats to democracy is apathy and the feeling of futility. Strengthening democracy is therefore partly a matter of enhancing people's confidence in democratic institutions and encouraging them to take part. Without this, democracy will not work. Low voter turnout in many countries is a cause for concern. When participation in the democratic process falls dramatically, it reflects a feeling of powerlessness and a crisis of confidence. In newly fledged democracies, the first free elections are generally characterized by great enthusiasm and voter participation. If the elected leaders fail to improve the lot of the majority of the population, or if there is widespread corruption, democracy loses its credibility in the eyes of many people.

Our efforts, through the provision of development assistance, will be focused on enabling people to understand that democracy is a means to a better life. Civil society must be strengthened so that people can be put in a position to influence developments that affect them at the national and local level. Voters must have confidence that their votes count.

In our common efforts to promote democracy, we must, on the one hand, stand firmly by our principles and, on the other, maintain a humble attitude. We must not depart from the principle that democracy involves diversity and choices, equality and respect for the individual. At the same time, we must bear in mind that there are different ways of organizing democracy. Unless allowance is made for local factors and culture, it is difficult for democracy to take root. Democracy cannot be imposed from without; it must be part of a process that is nourished from within. We must accept that this takes time.

Ms. Tuya (Mongolia): As I address the General Assembly on the issue of new or restored democracies, my mind goes back to the events of 10 years ago, when the first winds of change began to blow across my homeland, Mongolia, and when, defying the winter cold, crowds gathered in the streets to attend the first-ever rallies for democracy. That was in December 1989. At that time, we in Mongolia knew little about democracy. We were profoundly unfamiliar with the concept of human rights, and our knowledge about the world around us was utterly biased. Today, as we look back, we can see that what we have achieved in Mongolia over the past decade in building the institutions of democracy, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, unleashing private initiative and developing our external

relations has constituted a major advance towards a self-governing democratic society, a private-sector-led economy and a closer association with the rest of the international community.

For all of us in Mongolia, the past 10 years have been a demanding yet rewarding decade of learning — and unlearning — which has greatly broadened our understanding of the policies we should be pursuing to ensure a better life for all of us in Mongolia. That decade as a whole was marked by significant progress in our drive to simultaneously reform the nation's political and economic systems. As a citizen of Mongolia, I feel proud that my country has shown such a robust commitment to change; it is a privilege for me to have this opportunity to deliver this address on democracy at the United Nations as we mark and celebrate the tenth anniversary of the victory of democracy in Mongolia.

In recent years, in the area of political reform we have introduced and have been able to sustain a vibrant multi-party democracy. Democratic institutions have been solidly installed. Through periodic free and fair elections, through a free press and media and through various non-governmental organizations, the people are exercising their sovereign right of participation in national decision-making. The stability and viability of Mongolia's democratic institutions and the solidity of the culture of popular participation have passed the test of time in three parliamentary and three presidential elections since 1990, all of them held in a free and fair manner.

The new Constitution of Mongolia, incorporating and reflecting these fundamental changes, was adopted in January 1992. It guarantees human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of speech, freedom of the press, equality before the law and the independence of the judiciary. The Constitutional Court has emerged as a strong defender of democracy and human rights. Informed civil society is emerging and local self-governance is being strengthened. National debate on various policy issues has become a normal feature of the democratic process, thus introducing transparency in policy-making.

One of the most valuable achievements of democratization has been the change in the people's attitudes and ways of thinking. Political freedom and democracy have empowered the people and have released their entrepreneurial and creative energy, thus facilitating their active participation in the economic, social and political processes. We firmly believe that the feeling of

being able to influence decisions that directly affect one's life is one of the sweetest rewards of democracy.

The Government of the Democratic Coalition, which came to power as a result of the 1996 parliamentary elections, set forth an ambitious programme of further pursuing democratization and economic liberalization in Mongolia, and of strengthening good governance. In recent years, my country has been able, *inter alia*, to sustain an average annual growth rate of 3.5 per cent and to ensure a steady decrease of inflation from 53 per cent in 1996 to 6 per cent in 1998. As a result of the privatization process and of efforts to support the development of private enterprise, the private sector today produces more than 60 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. Almost all of our 32 million head of livestock are privately owned.

We firmly believe that transparency and accountability, better public management and a robust civil society are the essential ingredients of sustained development. The ongoing public-sector reform envisages the enactment of a bill on public-sector financing and management, anti-corruption policies, continued legal reform, improved law enforcement and further decentralization.

All in all, it can be concluded that the main political and legal foundation has been put in place for consolidating democratic transformation in Mongolia. Here, I wish to emphasize that our accomplishments of today were made possible with the unreserved support and assistance of the international community. On behalf of the Government of Mongolia I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the organizations of the United Nations system and to multilateral and bilateral donors for their support of our efforts to build a democratic society. By embarking on the road of democracy and pursuing an open, multi-pillared foreign policy, my country has acquired new partners, among both established and emerging democracies.

Still, 10 years later, as we assess our achievements from the perspective of what has been delivered in terms of reducing poverty, creating jobs and ensuring better living standards for the population, we feel that there is still a long way to go for us to fulfil the promise of democracy. At the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development, held at Bucharest, Romania, two years ago, the representatives of new or restored democracies noted that a democratic system of government is the best

model to ensure a framework of liberties for lasting solutions to the political, economic and social problems that our societies face. We fully endorse that statement, which, in fact, called on new or restored democracies to take responsibility not only for the political affairs of their societies but also for ensuring better living standards for their populations and for providing better health, better education and a better environment for them.

If the promise of democracy were to be gauged in terms of its contribution to all these, we indeed have a lot more to do. As our experience suggests, the greatest challenge that committed leaders of a developing country with a transitional economy and a new democracy face is to manage the tension that exists between democracy, seen and perceived as meaning a better life, and the harsh reality of financial constraints, lack of resources, structural inefficiencies and bad practices that need time to be fully addressed and resolved. In that sense, the tenth anniversary of the democratic movement in Mongolia, to be observed on 10 December, represents an important opportunity for us to take stock of past experience and draw lessons with a view to formulating a better vision for the future.

Since the first International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held at Manila back in 1988, democracy has emerged as a major international trend. Many States and their peoples have embarked upon a process of democratization for the first time. Others have moved to restore their democratic roots. Hence, gaining a growing number of adherents across cultural, social and economic lines, democracy is increasingly being recognized as an appropriate response to a wide range of human concerns, and as an ingredient for both sustainable development and lasting peace.

The globalization of economic activity and communications and continued and evolving threats to security, progress and development have generated a host of multifaceted challenges to both new and established democracies at the dawn of the new millennium. Here, I fully concur with the Secretary-General's conclusion, contained in his report (A/54/492), that while assistance to new or restored democracies should continue and increase in scope and magnitude, debate about the measures to be taken by established democracies to address those challenges in the coming decades should not be neglected.

The international conferences of new or restored democracies, as open forums with an active participation of Governments, intergovernmental bodies, academia and non-governmental organizations, are a fitting assembly in which

to share experiences and lessons learned, as well as to explore innovative approaches in meeting the existing and emerging challenges to democracy. In this respect, we believe that the upcoming Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, to be held in early December 2000 in Cotonou, Benin, under the theme "Democracy, Peace, Security and Development", will enrich our understanding of democracy and of its many components, of the linkages between democracy and development and of the ways and means to better address those challenges. My delegation also shares the hope expressed by the Secretary-General that the Benin Conference will, *inter alia*, examine imaginative ways and means to cooperate with other initiatives to strengthen democratic transformations throughout the world. One such initiative is the Forum on Emerging Democracies, held in Sana'a, Yemen, last June, which brought together a diverse group of countries whose democratic advances are less well known. The statement in the Sana'a Declaration to the effect that the international community has tended to focus on countries that are considered strategically more important or are in crisis, deserves, in our view, closer consideration.

Mongolia wishes to commend the efforts made by the Government of Romania since the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies to implement its important recommendations, including the creation of a follow-up mechanism and the elaboration of a code of democratic conduct. We believe that today's deliberations will help command effective support on the part of the international community for the Code of Democratic Conduct, which represents a basic set of democratic norms for Governments. It will, in our view, also contribute to the affirmation of a culture of democracy.

The Government of Mongolia commends the manifold assistance provided by the United Nations to new or restored democracies, ranging from support for promoting a culture of democracy, through electoral assistance, to institution- and capacity-building for democratization. In Mongolia, for one, the programme on decentralization and democracy support is being actively implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme. With its impartiality and universal legitimacy as well as its Charter-based purpose of promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, the United Nations is, in our view, uniquely placed to provide such assistance at the request of Member States.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize the importance of holding an open dialogue, such as we are having today, on challenges faced by countries in their efforts to develop, restore and consolidate democracy. Two years ago in Bucharest, Mongolia offered to hold one of the next conferences of new or restored democracies in Mongolia. It is our earnest hope that this will contribute to the continued process of learning and sharing ideas and experiences and identifying ways and means to adequately meet the challenges in the early years of the next millennium.

Mr. Al-Ashtal (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): For almost a decade now, concepts and principles of democracy have been spreading on a wide, global scale and have had a direct impact on the lives of many peoples around the world that were languishing under oppressive regimes. With the expanding circle of States that have adopted democratic systems of government, especially among the developing nations, the new or restored democratic States have emerged as active players. Thus, the First International Conference of New or Restored Democracies was convened in Manila in 1988, followed by the Managua and Bucharest Conferences. Now we look forward to the convening of the Fourth International Conference, in Cotonou, in December 2000. What distinguishes all these Conferences is that they are not limited exclusively to certain States or to certain themes. Attendance is open to all elements of civil society, and the discussion covers all aspects of democracy as a form of human thought as well as a multifaceted system of government based on the freedom of the individual and society.

Of course, the United Nations welcomed those International Conferences, as shown by the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, that called on the United Nations system to support Governments that were promoting and consolidating new or restored democracies in the areas of human rights, mobilization of civil society, assistance in elections, support for free and independent media and promotion of the rule of law. All this support has been achieved through programmes, conferences and workshops sponsored by the United Nations and its agencies, as shown in the report of the Secretary-General, which we warmly welcome. We hope that the United Nations support will increase and expand, given its significant impact, especially when a democratic system is new or recently restored. This stage, of course, is fraught with risks and potential setbacks, especially in developing countries, due to the lack of essential conditions for pursuing a democratic course, foremost among them the existence of an economic system that meets the basic living

and cultural needs of a society, in addition to the rule of law and the existence of a civil society that is robust with political and professional activities.

Against that backdrop for 11 years now, newly democratic States have become active through the International Conferences and the support of the United Nations in promoting democratic systems at all levels of society and State. In this session, those States have taken an important step by sponsoring the draft resolution on the Code of Democratic Conduct. We support that draft resolution, and we feel that a wide dissemination of the Code is essential. Indeed, some political activities should be organized in order to debate the components of the Code because of its unquestionable benefits for the consolidation of democratic awareness all over the world.

In this context, I would like to highlight the Forum on Emerging Democracies held in Sana'a on 30 June last. Sixteen States, along with representatives of political parties, the media, intellectuals, scholars and trade unionists participated in that Forum. Also, the Sana'a Declaration, which was adopted on 30 June 1999 at the end of the Forum, covered most of the components of the Code of Democratic Conduct. The Sana'a Declaration was annexed to an official document (A/54/321) of the United Nations under this same agenda item.

On this occasion, I am pleased to quote an excerpt from the statement made by Mr. Abdul-Qader Ba-Jammal, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Yemen, before the General Assembly at this session.

"I wish to reaffirm here the announcement of President Ali Abdullah Saleh that the Republic of Yemen would like to host the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies to be held in Asia in 2003." (A/54/PV.19, p. 22)

Our Foreign Minister went on to say that the Republic of Yemen has linked its national unity inextricably to the democratic process. It has also adopted the democratic approach as a constant process towards comprehensive development. The Government and the civil society of Yemen are working closely and strenuously to make democracy an irreversibly solid trend of national policy and an evolutionary process, so that democracy will ultimately become the focal point of political, social and economic life in Yemen.

Mr. Ortigue (United States of America): It is a pleasure for me to be here this morning to address this important topic. As Secretary of State Albright has said, democracy is always and everywhere a work in progress. Over the past 10 years the global growth of democracy has been inspiring and unprecedented. In every region, nations have emerged from repressive Governments, divisive conflicts and rigidly controlled economic systems. Thus, the United States firmly believes that the national interests of every United Nations Member are best served by the growth of democracy throughout our world.

Cooperation among people and Governments is essential if human rights, the rule of law, conflict resolution, political and social stability and economic growth are to continue to flourish. Only by drawing strength from each other's strengths, engaging in open dialogue and confronting challenges together can we sustain and solidify democratic practices throughout our world.

The United States therefore commends the Government of Romania for introducing the draft resolution under consideration today. This draft resolution is a tangible follow-up to the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Bucharest in 1997, and this draft resolution provides a timely and useful framework for putting the Conference's recommendations into practice.

Meetings and proclamations about democracy are of little lasting value unless concrete actions are taken to empower people to choose their own destinies through multi-party elections and other democratic practices. My Government therefore looks forward to contributing actively and substantively to the Fourth International Conference next year in Cotonou, Benin, on the important theme of "Democracy, Peace, Security and Development". We anticipate that the Benin Conference will advance the goals arising from the Conference in Bucharest and the earlier conferences of new or restored democracies.

The United States also commends the leadership shown by Romania in formulating the Code of Democratic Conduct and bringing it before the General Assembly. This instrument compellingly reaffirms fundamental principles of freedom and human rights for all peoples, principles the United States has taken the lead in supporting in this era of transition to democracy. The vast majority of the instrument's comprehensive definitions and standards will prove valuable not only to emerging nations, but also to well-established democracies, as they seek to address the

challenges of democratization and strengthen hard-won gains in the years ahead.

The United States delegation looks forward to working with the sponsors and other interested delegations to finalize a text that will contribute substantially to the ongoing evolution of democratic norms. We wish to bolster the increasingly widely supported view that democracy — government based on the will of the people, on the rule of law and on respect for human rights — offers the very best hope for all humanity. If the Code of Democratic Conduct helps prevent even one United Nations Member State from succumbing to the temptations of corruption, misuse of power or persecution of minorities, it will have served a very useful purpose indeed.

The draft resolutions introduced by Romania fit neatly into a growing and important phenomenon. Since the 1970s the number of electoral democracies has leapt, by one estimation, from 30 to more than 110. That is worth repeating: the number of electoral democracies has leapt, by one estimation, from 30 to more than 110. At the same time, we are seeing increasing efforts by the international community to support and provide guidance to new, restored and emerging democracies. To cite just a few examples from the past year: first, the founding statement of the New Delhi conference of the World-wide Movement for Democracy; secondly, the resolution entitled "Promotion of the right to democracy" adopted overwhelmingly by the United Nations Human Rights Commission; and thirdly, the Sana'a Declaration issued by the Forum on Emerging Democracies. In the coming year, there will be other important developments in this area, including the community of democracies ministerial meeting in Warsaw, Poland, to be held in June, and the December Conference of the New or Restored Democracies in Cotonou, Benin.

Genuine democracy is not a function of a single election or a single document. It depends on many factors, such as the development of a strong civil society, an informed citizenry, a free press, a loyal opposition and respect for human rights and the rule of law. Without fear of justifiable contradiction, I declare to this Assembly that democratic Governments represent the best means of fostering political stability, economic progress and peaceful cooperation among nations.

In closing, let me say that the United States is proud to support the movement of new or restored democracies. We continue to work with our partners in the United

Nations and in other international organizations to help transform democratic principles into reality for people throughout the world. Human beings, beyond the majestic mountains, across the serene valleys and broad plains and also in the overcrowded metropolises, all swell with pride, and people of every hue and conviction embrace this mighty movement in support of democratic freedoms, this movement in support of new or restored democracies for peoples throughout the world.

Mr. Pal (India): Over half a century ago, when India became independent, there were those outside who wondered whether a country so huge, so ethnically diverse, which had more languages and religions than some continents have, and whose distinct regional cultures and traditions traced themselves independently to the roots of Indian civilization could long stay on the democratic path which we had chosen, particularly because extremely difficult choices would have to be made as we tackled the enormous challenge of development. In India, however, there was consensus that, precisely because at one level we were so diverse, only a system of governance that respected plurality would work for us. By definition, we could only be a democracy in political form and flourish by cultivating and nourishing the democratic ethos in spirit.

There is a seminal lesson, we believe, in our experience. It is in States that seem unwieldy or difficult to govern that democracy is most needed. The tempters and the Cassandras might say that a strong autocratic hand is needed to hold fragile and complex societies together. They are wrong — authoritarian structures crumble; democracies grow and thrive.

We know from our experience that democratic developing countries have special problems. Again by definition, a democracy cannot impose totalitarian solutions on its citizens. As a result, over the first 30-odd years of our independent life, our economy did not grow as spectacularly as did those of others where draconian regimes could carry through policies that had a serious social and political impact on their citizens, but produced remarkable figures of growth. Our initial progress was elephantine, not tigerish — a pace constrained by the imperatives of the democratic system when the foundation is being laid. And now, the foundations having been collectively laid, our economy is taking off. We recognize the calibrated policy initiatives required to encourage this.

The moral of this story, too, from our experience as an established democracy — and not irrelevant for our partners in the new or restored democracies — is that

democracy cannot be treated as a fad to be tried and tossed away if it produces no instant results. Democracy is and must be a way of settled national life; unless it is accepted completely and unequivocally, it will not work.

Earlier this year, when only one vote in our Parliament led to the fall of the last Government and to yet another round of general elections, some voices abroad again questioned the cost of universal suffrage in a developing country like India. This thought never crossed our minds. Like anything worth having, democracy has its costs and we are happy to bear them. The nearly 600 million who constitute the Indian electorate showed once again that it is they who hold the gift of power and that those whom they choose to lead the nation are accountable to the will of the people. Given a choice, what would any nation have — new governments, democratically elected, even with the attendant expense and distractions, or the deceptive order and stolidity of a restored dictatorship?

We are glad that, even though there has been the occasional lamentable backsliding, democracy is the one norm on which there is almost universal consensus. The strength of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is a good barometer of democratic progress and we are particularly delighted that, this year, the Deputy Chairman of the Upper House of our Parliament, Mrs. Najma Heptullah, was unanimously elected President of the Union, the first woman in its 110-year history to hold this post.

Turning to the role the United Nations can play in supporting the new or restored democracies, monitoring human rights and providing electoral assistance through workshops and seminars only scratch the surface. What is required is assistance through a needs-based approach, drawing on the recommendations of the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Bucharest in 1997, which defined the following imperatives facing them: the consolidation of democracy; security and peace; economic freedom in a globalizing world; social order and justice; and integration into the global order. It is in these areas that the United Nations can and should play a supportive role.

The Secretary-General reports that, after the democratic transformations of the 1970s and 1980s, the consolidation of the democratic process is a matter of prime concern. The continuation of global democratization, the Secretary-General says, is not necessarily assured. Recent events have shown how true this is. While we can rejoice with Nigeria and Indonesia

in their triumphant return to democracy, military coups have taken place elsewhere. Countries which are themselves mature democracies and claim to promote democratic ideals everywhere should not be seen to be closet sympathizers of those who overthrow democracy or to be soft in reaction to any challenge thrown down to democratic norms. Countries where democracy has not taken root will watch anxiously to see how the powerful democracies of the world react when a restored democracy is snatched back to military rule.

The Secretary-General has welcomed the decision of the Summit of the Organization of African Unity, held in Algiers in July this year, that leaders of military regimes would no longer be accepted at its summits. The heads of Government of the Commonwealth, meeting at Durban in November, welcomed back Nigeria, but decided to suspend from their councils another member whose Government had been overthrown by the military. They called for the restoration of civilian democratic rule without delay and for the observance of the rule of law in that country. These are decisions that will help to encourage global democratization and the consolidation of democracy. The world must not provide legitimacy to those who usurp or undermine democracy.

We welcome the Ashkabad declaration of the Central Asian Republics, as well as the Budapest Declaration of the Council of Europe. Threats posed by terrorism, aggressive nationalism and challenges to the territorial integrity of democratic States have been underscored in both these Declarations. The Declaration and Programme on Education for Democratic Citizenship of the Council of Europe clearly notes that education is an important tool in strengthening an individual's awareness of his or her rights and responsibilities, as well as to develop a capacity to exercise these rights and respect the rights of others. These elements are crucial not only to new and restored democracies, but also to the continued consolidation of the democratic process worldwide.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action examined in detail the linkages between democracy, development and human rights. The fact that these are mutually reinforcing requires constant reminders. Democracy cannot flourish without economic and social development and a broad-based economic and social development can take place in any country only with the full participation of its people in the political, social and cultural process. As Professor Amartya Sen has argued in his latest book, development is freedom.

It is our considered view that governance is only one aspect in the consolidation of democracy. Democratic governance implies governance through the will of the citizen, exercised through independent constitutional mechanisms, and therefore it is the will of the people that defines the political institutions, the economic and social manifestos, the targets and the instruments. But reaching democratically set targets needs resources. Resources are the crucial factor which can determine the difference between good governance that delivers and governance, no matter how well-meaning, that cannot meet the needs of its people. Extraterritorial and other threats to the sovereignty of States is a second factor that can divert attention from social and economic development. Too narrow a focus on governance, therefore, without adequate attention to the challenges of development and security, will not help consolidate new and restored democracies. We must look at the consolidation and promotion of democracies worldwide and holistically.

We note with particular interest, therefore, that in one of his recommendations the Secretary-General says that, while paying the closest attention to the needs of the new and restored democracies,

"debate about the measures to be taken by established democracies to address the multifaceted challenges of globalization and threats to security, progress and development in the coming decades should not be neglected." (A/54/492, para. 36)

It is with precisely this objective in mind that a group of established democracies decided earlier this year to start a new initiative, which we call the "community of democracies", drawing all democracies together in a celebration of our common belief and commitment, which we wish to translate into a heritage to succeeding generations, and to address our common challenges. We see this initiative as complementing the efforts of the new and restored democracies and as consolidating the democratic ideal worldwide.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): Sometimes left unmentioned in discussing today's globalized, wired and interconnected post-cold-war world is the wave of democratization that in the past decade has helped make sure that freedom rings in more countries than at any other time in history. If this is a sign that democracy and freedom, whether hard-fought or otherwise, are on the verge of being taken for granted, then indeed we have much work ahead of us.

Even though today thoughts and ideas can be freely spread across the globe at the press of a button, even though today the fruits of one's labours can be transported quickly and efficiently across the oceans, we must not give in to complacency or make any less effort to help others realize democratic progress. For democracy sustains civil society, liberates the entrepreneurial spirit and lifts development to peaks of innovation and creativity. Our future progress will not be sustained if we do not ensure the spread of democracy and if we do not allow political and social freedoms to flourish. Our efforts to make democracy universal must continue.

It is with the objective of universal realization that the First International Conference of Newly Restored Democracies, which was originally conceived by the late Secretary of Foreign Affairs Raul Manglapus and fully supported by then President Corazon Aquino, was convened in Manila in 1988. We knew then that the new democracies themselves had to take a firm hand in promoting respect for democratic principles and in fostering the dissemination and a broader understanding of democracy and the indissoluble link between democracy, peace and development.

At our second Conference, held in Managua in 1994, we took another important step when we adopted the Managua Declaration and Plan of Action, which addressed issues relating to the political and reconciliation processes within national societies, human rights and the right of all nations to development, economic reforms, structural adjustment programmes and other problems facing democratic States.

Recognizing that democracy, good governance and participation are of crucial importance for the conduct of Governments in service to their people, the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies was held in Bucharest in 1997. There, subsequently, we drew up the draft resolution entitled "Code of Democratic Conduct", of which my delegation is a sponsor. The draft resolution expresses appreciation to the United Nations system and seeks further support from it in the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies.

The Philippines also hosted the World Conference on Governance, held in Manila from 31 May to 4 June 1999, in cooperation with United Nations agencies and other international organizations. The meeting underscored the need to examine the conventional wisdom that governance is government. Focus was placed on four issues of

governance: transparency, ethics and anti-corruption values; judicial reforms; civil reforms and human resource reform; and poverty redressal and services delivery. It also adopted in 1999 Manila Declaration on Governance, which recognizes the primacy of good governance for empowering people, developing communities and building nations.

To achieve the evolving universality of democratization, the Philippine Government is looking forward to the Fourth International Conference, to be hosted by Benin in December 2000 to give more meaning and fruition to the democratic gains enjoyed by some countries and to continue to reinforce the collective commitment towards democracy. That meeting is particularly meaningful because it will be the first Conference of New or Restored Democracies to be held in Africa and the first of the new millennium. Let us not lose the momentum in the process of strengthening democratic institutions and development.

The new global democratic world order is in the process of gaining recognition and rapid evolution. Yet there are substantial problems facing the old as well as the new democracies. There are still a number of things to do, and the draft resolution on the Code of Democratic Conduct is a significant progressive step towards the embodiment of national governance validated by international standards. The Code, which stemmed from the political document adopted by the Third International Conference, held in Romania, as well as from other internationally accepted documents, contains provisions aimed at a basic set of norms of democratic conduct for Governments in the exercise of power. These include free, fair and competitive elections; separation of powers; respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; strengthening the rule of law and the application of practices of good governance and fundamental freedoms; increasing the participation of civil society in the development of democracy; creating an economic environment favourable to democracy; and enhancing social cohesion and solidarity, among others.

Globalization has become an inescapable reality of our times. We have been able to reach this stage of globalization because much of the world has adhered to democratic ideals and has not closed its mind or feared the interaction necessary for globalization. But the benefits of globalization are not experienced uniformly around the world. I am confident that none of us will lose sight of the importance of ensuring that the blessings of globalization fall on everyone, rich or poor, or of the

significant role globalization plays in our common efforts to strengthen and spread democracy.

Another problem facing our efforts, though a far more insidious one, is the threat to democratic institutions brought by international terrorists and international organized crime. Terrorism thrives on fear and sustains itself by warping noble ideas and misrepresenting the truth. Because of the peculiar and furtive nature of terrorism and organized crime, democratic institutions have had to undertake extraordinary measures. We must make sure that none of these measures come even close to doing injustice to the very rights that democracy ensures. In addition, our commitment to democracy calls on us to make sure that poverty, injustice and other basic social ills are resolved, and in so doing, we will put an end to the seemingly endless circle of terrorism and criminal violence.

Finally, my delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report. We support his proposals, particularly those aimed at contributing to the Benin 2000 Conference and the future assistance to be given by the United Nations system to Governments to promote new or restored democracies. I urge all Member States to reflect more actively on the direction of the democratic movement as we enter the new millennium.

Mr. Erdős (Hungary) (*spoke in French*): Hungary welcomes the interest shown in the process on new or restored democracies and the follow-up activities engaged in since the Third International Conference on this question. We would like to thank the Government of Romania for its pre-eminent role in coordinating these activities.

Over the last decade, important events have occurred in the world which have considerably strengthened the global process of democratization. This march of democracy continues today, and it has enlarged the family of democratic nations through its new additions, where the ideals of democracy have triumphed. Perhaps one day, in order to reflect this evolution, we will see the United Nations Charter fill a rather peculiar gap by including the term "democracy".

With regard to the Euro-Atlantic area, the region of Central and Eastern Europe, where my country is located, played a crucial role, without any exaggeration, in the upheavals of 10 years ago and in the fundamental change of the world's political landscape for democracy. It is worth pointing out that it is precisely in this part of Europe that the old continent — I daresay, the entire world — was

divided in two 50 years ago under dramatic circumstances. Here we saw the iron curtain descend on Europe, that line of separation which subsequently hung for several decades and embodied multi-faceted confrontation — ideological, political, military and economic confrontation — between totalitarian and democratic systems.

In the spring of 1989, just 10 years ago, Hungary dismantled the barbed-wire fences along its frontiers with Austria and, a few months later, opened up the border, thus enabling the free and unimpeded departure to the West of tens of thousands of citizens from the German Democratic Republic, who earlier had sought refuge in Hungary. For all those who lived through or followed these mind-boggling, heady times, that was the beginning of the spectacular end of an era overtaken by history. It heralded the victory of the democratic model over a fossilized system. Shortly afterward, these events were followed by the fall of the Berlin wall, the most warped physical symbol of the cold war.

The last decade has led to radical transformations on the world scene, and particularly in Eastern Europe. Free democratic elections are regularly held in most countries of this region; democratic change of government is becoming a reality; and institutions function according to their constitutional roles. In short, today the state of law is becoming an intrinsic part of these countries, and it is irresistibly gaining ground there.

As we stressed when speaking on this agenda item last year, we must say that in addition to the global dynamic of democratization, in some places the phenomenon of the police state or the authoritarian regime, oppression, or overt or more covert attempts to mar democracy still persists. As the Secretary-General pointed out in his latest report on the work of the Organization, more than 60 per cent of the countries in the world today have some form of democratic government. This means — let us add this point — that a certain number of them do not yet have it. Hence, the need to continue efforts to promote democratic governance and to respect the political conditions of each country so that popular participation in public management finally will extend to all countries of the world.

The experience through which Hungary and many other countries lived during these last 10 years has not been easy, either economically or socially. We have gone through an unprecedented transition which has no equal

in international relations. Why? one might ask. Because, in an incredibly short space of time, we had to change a single-party system and a centralized economy which were firmly entrenched to a system of parliamentary democracy and market economy based on ideals of social justice, a change of scenario for which no script existed.

In addition, in the case of certain countries, this change involved a transformation in an unfavourable international situation, when their immediate neighbours were suffering the effects of wars, nationalist demagoguery, material devastation and economic sanctions. Furthermore, the countries in transition are confronting new challenges, including crime, corruption and various manifestations of intolerance, which are hardly conducive to a problem-free evolution.

In this respect, Hungary has gained much from international experience, more specifically from the negotiations to join the European Union, which, in fact, are a long series of in-depth studies about the situation of each of the countries that want to be admitted to this European body, studies which cover a huge range of questions, from human rights, the environment, education and employment to social affairs and the campaign against corruption and drugs. We learned rather quickly that the design for society called "democracy" is not a perfect structure in which things all fit together with perfect ease. This design is far from being paternalistic, and it requires that every man and woman show a spirit of enterprise and participation at all levels of society. Nevertheless, as a country that has had to confront all of these challenges and difficulties, we wish to proclaim from this rostrum that the benefits of and the prospects offered by this transition are definitely worth the effort, because of the solidity of our democratic system, social stability, rapid economic development and constructive cooperation with our democratic neighbours.

Hungary is pleased again this year to co-sponsor draft resolutions A/54/L.23 and A/54/L.33, which have just been introduced by the Secretary of State from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, because these drafts translate the universal message of the importance of democratic governance, signalling the end of a bi-polar world during this period of dizzying globalization at the threshold of a new millennium.

We are confident that following the subsequent consultations, we will all be able to find common ground concerning the Code of Democratic Conduct. We welcome the decision of the Government of Benin to organize the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored

Democracies next year in Cotonou. We are confident of success in the work awaiting us — after Asia, America and Europe — this time in Africa, that great continent which now is truly committed to the great march towards democracy.

Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): The last decade of the twentieth century will go down in the history of mankind as an era of profound political changes. Colonialism, apartheid and the concept of world communism belong in the past. Most countries which have regained their independence proclaim their commitment to democracy, whose principles are becoming more universal and whose effectiveness is not called into question.

Since it gained independence on 1 September 1991, the Republic of Uzbekistan has determined the priority directions for the development of a democratic, free society, one in which human interests and human rights are preminent. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan serves as the legal guarantee for the democratic development of our country.

In this connection, I am pleased to note the active participation and cooperation by the United Nations in creating and improving the democratic institutions and structures of Uzbekistan. Specific examples of this interaction are the creation, with the assistance of the United Nations, of the institution of the Ombudsman of the parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan to deal with human rights and the creation of the National Centre on Human Rights. It is very significant that, in May 2000, at the very beginning of the third millennium, Uzbekistan will be commemorating the fifth anniversary of the office of the Ombudsman, an organ which in a very short period has had a significant impact on the socio-political processes in our society. In May next year, the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan is planning to hold an international conference on the development of this institution and is counting on assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In the process of continuing democratic reforms, the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan attaches great importance to the programme entitled "Democratization, Human Rights and Governance" in Uzbekistan, which is being carried out within the framework of cooperation with UNDP and the democratic institutions of the Republic. In the opinion of the Government, the first stage of this programme has yielded very fruitful results and has attained its goal: broad knowledge in society of

the heritage and experience of world democracy and how it can be applied in Uzbekistan's conditions. We hope that very soon the drafting and implementing of the second stage of the programme will start, and we call upon the senior officials of UNDP to lend us every assistance.

Uzbekistan has a clear understanding that the prospects for developing democracy in our country are directly linked to stability throughout the whole Central Asian region. Unfortunately, there have been increasing outbreaks by certain forces that advocate religious and political terrorism and extremism. Taking cover behind the idea of creating a Muslim State in the territory of Uzbekistan, they deem admissible the commission of terrorist acts, murder, violence, hostage-taking for ransom and trading in drugs.

It is extremely clear to us that the sole goal of these forces is to overthrow the legally elected Government and to forcibly change the State structure of the Republic of Uzbekistan. However, the people of Uzbekistan has made its choice, and it will not swerve from the path of democratic reforms that it has chosen and will not allow any attacks on its independence and freedom. We sincerely hope and trust that the United Nations and the international community will demonstrate solidarity with the people of Uzbekistan and will strongly condemn the destructive activities of these forces.

I take this opportunity to inform the Assembly that on 5 November an inter-religious political forum-dialogue took place in Tashkent, entitled "Religion and Democracy", in which prominent academics and representatives of various religious denominations and international non-governmental organizations took part. Participants in the forum adopted the Tashkent Resolution, containing an appeal to the United Nations to proclaim 2002 the year of interreligious solidarity in combatting international terrorism and extremism. May I express the hope that the Assembly will support this initiative

Today, the Republic of Uzbekistan is about to hold its second free elections. Deputies to the parliament will be elected on 5 December and the presidential elections will be held on 9 January 2000. We hope that as a result of the elections democratic reforms will be successfully continued and will be given new life. Bearing in mind the unquestioned authority of the United Nations in encouraging democratic reform in Member countries, the Republic has sent an invitation to representatives of the Organization to participate in these upcoming elections as observers.

Recognizing the role of the United Nations in the process of democratization in new and restored democracies, Uzbekistan traditionally joins in sponsoring the draft resolution entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies" which we hope will be adopted today by the Assembly, by consensus as usual.

Uzbekistan, a country with a restored democracy, participates actively in international forums devoted to a more in-depth understanding of the role of democracy in the present stage of human development. In this connection I wish to support the outcome of the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development, which took place in September 1997 in Bucharest, where the delegation of Uzbekistan took an active part. I also express gratitude to the Government of Benin for its willingness to host, in December 2000, the Fourth World Conference on this subject.

In conclusion, I should like to quote an excerpt from a book entitled *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century: Guarantees for Stability, Conditions of Security and Progress* by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Mr. Islam A. Karimov:

"We have every reason to be convinced that we will attain the supreme goals of building a democratic State with responsible government, an open civil society and a free-market economy. The basis for this conviction lies in our rich history and great culture, which has made an invaluable contribution to world civilization; in our natural and intellectual potential; in the high spiritual and moral values of our people; in their enterprise, open thinking and desire to take their rightful place in the world society."

Ms. Rasi (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union on agenda item 39, entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies". The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries of Cyprus and Malta align themselves with this statement.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

No system of governance can claim perfection. Contemporary forms of democracy are no exception. Yet democracy is today unchallenged as the best form of governance. There are no serious alternatives available. By providing appropriate mechanisms for the regular change of Governments, democracy protects the capacity, reliability and integrity of core State institutions. Experience has shown that only democracy has been able to uphold the rule of law, as well as to ensure respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially the right and opportunity of everyone to take part in the conduct of public affairs of his or her country.

By making Governments accountable to citizens, democracy makes Governments more responsive to popular concerns and provides incentives for transparency in decision-making. Democracy, by ensuring greater popular participation, also has a positive impact on development and on human security. Democracy makes it possible for national development goals to reflect the aspirations and priorities of society and enables society to develop and make use of its full potential for sustainable development. Democracy generally correlates with lower levels of internal violence, and democracies very rarely go to war against each other. Democratization has become both the objective of and the instrument for resolving conflicts. Indeed, the European Union subscribes to the view that democracy, human rights, peace and development are all interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Nowadays almost every Government calls itself democratic and most countries have adopted several features of formal democracy, in particular the holding of elections. Yet not all Governments live up to democratic standards, such as the accountability of rulers, political and civic pluralism, the rule of law and respect for human rights, and therefore fail to provide for everyone the freedom and conditions necessary to participate fully in the political process. The new or restored democracies have a key role to play in bringing about such a common understanding of democracy and of the minimum conditions and principles of democracy that have to be met. In this context, the European Union welcomes the initiative to draw together existing international standards into a Code of Democratic Conduct and supports its adoption by the General Assembly.

In the course of the last three decades, an ever-increasing number of countries — including countries that

are now members of the European Union — have embraced democracy as their preferred form of governance. Today, in a clear majority of the world's nations the people have the opportunity periodically and freely to express their will concerning the Government of their countries, notably through the conduct of periodic, free and fair elections. One manifestation of this positive global trend is the series of international conferences of new or restored democracies, which is attracting increasing interest. While in 1988 at Manila a total of 13 Governments participated in the first Conference, the Conference in Managua in 1994 attracted increased interest, and some 80 Governments attended the most recent Conference, held in Bucharest in 1997.

The European Union welcomes this trend and hopes that the choice of an African venue for the holding of the Fourth Conference of New or Restored Democracies will contribute to strengthening the momentum, since Africa is a continent where democratization, at present, is gaining important ground.

The European Union welcomes the role of the United Nations system in providing support to the conference processes, and in this context pledges its own support for the efforts of the Government of Benin, which has undertaken to organize the Conference at Cotonou towards the end of the year 2000.

We welcome the increasingly important role played by the group of new or restored democracies here at the United Nations, as reflected in the strong support in the General Assembly for resolutions on democratization.

The European Union believes that the consolidation of new or restored democracies must be at the forefront of our joint endeavours. This consolidation process must make democracy so stable and so deeply institutionalized and legitimate that all significant political actors, both in power and in opposition, fully embrace democratic procedures of governance.

The United Nations system has an impressive record of assisting democratization processes around the world, whether as part of peacekeeping or peace-building efforts, in the form of electoral assistance or through its governance programmes. The European Union is supporting many of these activities and will continue to work closely with the United Nations in this field.

I would like to commend in particular the work of the Electoral Assistance Division as focal point for all

requests made of the United Nations in the field of electoral assistance.

The United Nations Development Programme is substantially contributing to democratization through national capacity- and institution-building and in the field of strengthening governance.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights promotes the rule of law and democracy-related activities through, *inter alia*, technical cooperation projects, human rights field presences and system-wide activities.

Also, within the European Union, a lively debate is under way about the challenges to democratic governance stemming from the deepening of European integration. Making the institutions of the Union more democratic and bringing them closer to the people is one of the main challenges for the European Union in the years ahead, to which the Union is fully committed. Under the Treaty on European Union, democracy and respect for human rights are the preconditions for membership of the Union, and these are also key objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The support of democratization processes is a key element of European Union assistance programmes and policy dialogue, including in the framework of cooperation with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

The European Union welcomed the holding of the first genuinely multi-party elections in Indonesia and the formation of a democratic Government. The European Union considers these developments a basis for further change, leading to a civic society based on democratic principles, the rule of law and international human rights standards, including those concerning minorities.

The European Union also welcomes the continuing democratization process in Nigeria, which has been supported by overall improvements in the human rights situation.

Today the world speaks out against any change of democratic government by undemocratic means, such as *coups d'état*. In this context, the European Union remains concerned by the military coup in Pakistan and requests a speedy restoration of democratic civilian rule.

Let me conclude by recalling that as we all know from our own histories, the establishment and strengthening of democracy is not an easy task. It requires not only sustained efforts on the part of the entire society as well as

wise leadership, but also international assistance. The European Union will continue to strongly support the efforts of the movement of the new and restored democracies as well as the United Nations.

Mr. Moutari (Niger) (*spoke in French*): Almost exactly two months ago, the Prime Minister and head of Government of the Republic of Niger spoke before the Assembly about the transition process that my country has embarked upon to restore a durable and stable democracy.

That was on 30 September. The people of Niger had recently adopted by referendum the Constitution of 18 July, which paved the way for the establishment of democratic institutions in Niger.

I am pleased to announce today that the timetable drawn up by the Independent National Electoral Commission, which was announced in this very Hall by the Prime Minister, has been fully respected. The presidential and legislative elections were held as scheduled on 17 October and 24 November 1999, to the great satisfaction of the people of Niger and of national and international observers.

The President of the Republic and the 83 members of Parliament, all freely elected in conditions of absolute transparency, fairness and neutrality, will soon officially take up their duties.

Clearly, democracy is not limited to the holding of a series of elections. That is why we ardently hope that the United Nations and our other customary external partners will continue to work with us to help us lay the foundations of a true democracy. We hope to receive from all the necessary support in order to help us consolidate our gains and to allow Niger to join the family of democratic nations in the twenty-first century.

In our view, this shows clearly the importance of the draft resolution that we are considering today, entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies".

In this regard, my delegation welcomes the concise report of the Secretary-General (A/54/492), which contains very useful information, *inter alia* on the follow-up mechanism to the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Bucharest in September 1997.

Within the framework of the follow-up mechanism to this important Conference, my delegation also welcomes the publication of the Code of Democratic Conduct as an official document of the General Assembly. Allow me warmly to thank the Romanian Government for the extremely valuable role it played in the adoption of that document.

My delegation also supports the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report, namely those relating to the steps that well-established democracies must take in order to tackle the many challenges of globalization and to neutralize the threats to their security, progress and development.

This provides ample justification for the theme of the Fourth Conference, to be hosted by Benin in December 2000, entitled "Democracy, Peace, Security and Development". My Government would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our sister Republic of Benin on its decision to host the next Conference. Indeed, after Asia, Latin America and Europe, it is the first time that an African country will host this important Conference.

I wish to express the hope that the Conference will have a very successful outcome. My Government will work closely with our brothers in Benin so that this great meeting can lead to concrete measures aimed at consolidating new democratic institutions in Africa and in the world. Intensive preparations are already under way, both at the level of the United Nations and in the host country, which are very promising.

Niger has just convinced the international community of the now-irreversible nature of the democratic process that is under way and of its firm commitment to set up durable democratic institutions. In this context, my Government will organize in Niamey, from 6 to 9 December, a workshop on the theme "Army and democracy in Africa". We invite all interested States to participate in this workshop, which will bring together representatives of the Government, political parties, universities, trade unions and other structures of civil society.

Along the same lines, we have submitted for the consideration of the international community a pilot project that aims to put an end to illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, whose proliferation poses a serious threat to peace and security and also undermines the rule of law.

I would like here to reiterate my country's sincerest thanks to all of the States that have expressed an interest in this project, namely, France, Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany.

As is well known, democracy and development are inextricably linked, because any democratic process is by definition fragile if it is not based on sustainable development. Indeed, poverty is one of the most serious threats to democracy. That is why the United Nations, within the framework of its support for Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, must focus on the fight against poverty, the promotion of education, the eradication of illiteracy, conflict prevention and post-conflict peace-building.

In conclusion, I should like to stress that my delegation co-sponsored draft resolution A/54/L.33 because we endorse all of its provisions and wholeheartedly support its political message, especially given the fact that the principal institutions whose mission is to provide assistance to poor countries are currently experiencing a drastic decline in official development assistance and are consequently beginning a process of restructuring which, if we are not careful, could distort the very substance of the mission for which they were created.

We therefore earnestly hope that the General Assembly will adopt the draft resolution by consensus. In doing so, it will give a strong and encouraging signal to democracy — a signal of its unwavering dedication to the rule of law and its definitive condemnation of current or future dictatorships.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am pleased to express the thanks of the Central American Governments for the report of the Secretary-General on activities carried out by the United Nations in support of the various democratization processes currently under way. The support that this Organization has provided is leading towards the welcome consolidation of emerging democracies that require appropriate support and follow-up.

The Central American countries welcome the fact that the United Nations has set itself the task of increasing its ability duly to respond to the requests of Member States, with the aim of strengthening their efforts to build stable and lasting democracies. The setting in motion of a cycle of international conferences on new or restored democracies has been of great benefit

in strengthening such democracies and has provided a steady and positive impetus to the democratization process, which is being carefully examined through a follow-up mechanism created by those conferences and currently under the skilful chairmanship of the Government of Romania.

It is very reassuring to look back on the tenacity of the various democratization processes, despite the difficulties and hardships encountered along the way. It is also stimulating to assess the positive affects generated by these international conferences, which began in 1988 in Manila with the participation of 13 States. Happily, when the Conference took place in Managua in 1994, the number of participants increased to 76 States and 25 observers. Furthermore, it continued to grow: in Bucharest in 1997, 80 States, 14 international organizations and 47 non-governmental organizations took part. This undoubtedly reflects the interest of the international community in our democratic processes, which is encouraging and stimulates us to continue our efforts to build a more just and equitable world for future generations.

The implementation of the recommendations resulting from the conferences and the follow-up pursued through the mechanisms created for that purpose have been vital for the positive development of democratic processes and have served as the basis for the preparation of the next International Conference, which is to take place in Cotonou, Benin, in December 2000.

We view the building of democracy as a formative process during which new or restored democracies have had to overcome very difficult obstacles. For that reason, we should examine the initial challenges that made conditions difficult in many cases, including in three Central American countries. Peacemaking and the complex processes of transition required a great deal of dedication and perseverance. Peace required consolidation, and we had to work very hard in order to change mentalities and put into practice a culture of peace, tolerance and non-violence. The process of transition towards democracy is being accompanied by changes in State structures, together with administrative transformation, economic reorientation and the modernization of public administration. At the same time, we have re-established individual and political rights, fostered pluralism, citizen participation, freedom of expression and civic education.

The lack of a democratic tradition makes new and restored democracies fragile and vulnerable and requires the constant promotion of appropriate education for

democracy through the dissemination of democratic values among populations. All of these changes have of course been accompanied by the adaptation of legal orders, constitutional reform or the adoption of new constitutions so as to lay the foundations for a State based on the rule of law.

Following such structural changes and changes in mentality, emerging democracies have to face other challenges, such as the issue of governance. This leads to dialogue among the different political groups, the armed forces, trade unions, the private sector, religious authorities, ethnic groups and other sectors of civil society. The internal process of dialogue has been fundamental in the creation of clear democratic prospects through civic participation through these sectors.

Ensuring the primacy of civil power over military power has also proved essential. This makes it possible to break the traditional pattern of military governments, which were also authoritarian or totalitarian. The support of the international community has guaranteed stability for civil and democratic Governments. This has led our Governments to rethink their national planning policies and to reformulate their foreign policies so as to respond to the new requirements. In recent years, we have been faced with new challenges that require all of our attention if we are to consolidate the achievements and the progress made in our democratic processes. I should like to stress, among other issues, the strengthening of the rule of law, an aspect that is closely linked to the credibility of our State and Government institutions. The confidence and security that can be instilled in our citizens through the professional and transparent management of public administration will help reaffirm our efforts to establish solid and lasting democracies.

The fight against administrative corruption, the search for efficiency and the proper investment of public funds should create a climate conducive to democratization. It is also important to revitalize the participation of civil society in the decision-making processes and to ensure non-discrimination among the different sectors that make up society.

Along with these challenges, changes have taken place at the international level as a result of the new patterns and trends in international relations in the economic and commercial sphere.

The globalization of world economies has given rise to the creation of economic blocs in various parts of the

world. New or restored democracies must not be marginalized in this process or in the growing trend towards opening markets and dynamic technological development promoted by developed countries with an acknowledged democratic tradition. New or restored democracies need: fair treatment with respect to the debts they inherited from anti-democratic governments; preferential access to major world markets; concessionary credit policies by international financial institutions; cooperation in the economic, technological and educational spheres; and the advantages to be gained from aid and assistance programmes by international organizations for our countries' most vulnerable populations.

The national and international situation challenges us to bolster the constitutional systems and democratic institutions that we have been building with great tenacity; in this way we shall continue to preserve peaceful coexistence in our societies.

Democracy must be accompanied by the comprehensive and sustainable development of our countries, in a way that reconciles technological progress, economic growth and social well-being with environmental protection and conservation in order to ensure peace and security.

There are enemies posing an imminent danger to the consolidation of democracy; we must face the challenge of fighting them. Those enemies include international crime such as drug trafficking, terrorism, all forms of the smuggling of human beings and trafficking in weapons, stolen vehicles, *et cetera*. Then, on the domestic scene, we must not forget the fight against poverty and destitution, the improvement of health and education systems, and strict respect for human rights.

All of those factors are closely linked to the establishment of the draft Code of Democratic Conduct that has been formulated in the context of the work of the International Conferences of New or Restored Democracies. The effective implementation of the Code, whose substance is broad but necessary and praiseworthy, would meet the basic goals for strengthening our fragile democracies and would enable us to take the proper path towards consolidating this process, which is a crucial task for our peoples. The draft Code of Democratic Conduct calls on Governments to establish minimum requirements that would meet key needs for achieving democratization.

In one way or another, we in new or restored democracies, with all our limitations and shortcomings but

with strong will and commitment, have been working to address all the items set out in the draft Code. We believe that this mechanism will be the right way to consider the achievements, the deadlocks, the difficulties and the progress in the efforts we have made. As an important step towards self-evaluation, it will help us learn from our mistakes and will stimulate the setting of new goals in the difficult but positive process of building the more just democratic societies that we all desire.

We confidently hope that the at the coming conference of new or restored democracies, to be held at Cotonou, Benin, will enable us to continue to make solid progress towards overcoming obstacles and achieving the development and consolidation of democracy in our countries.

Mr. Larrain (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is pleased to address the General Assembly on the agenda item entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies". We view this as crucial for the United Nations, since it is part of the great purpose of promoting democracy. The importance of this matter is on the increase because in recent years we have witnessed growing democratization touching some countries whose populations had never before experienced democracy and others, such as Chile, that had lost it for a time.

My delegation is a sponsor of the two draft resolutions before the Assembly on this item: draft resolution A/54/L.33, which is the traditional text similar to the one adopted by consensus last year; and a new text, draft resolution A/54/L.23 on a Code of Democratic Conduct, which was painstakingly prepared by members of the follow-up mechanism of the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, led by Romania. We congratulate them on their work.

In the process of establishing or restoring a democratic system, the international community must support the particular transition model that the country in question has accepted to set up democratic institutions and promote full respect for human rights. Democracy and respect for human rights go hand in hand; neither can exist without the other. That is the first challenge that every people must meet as it establishes or restores democracy: it must try to ensure that justice is done *vis-à-vis* the human rights abuses committed by the former non-democratic regime. To achieve this, the populations of many States that had had non-democratic regimes have

sought a way to bring about democratization through a transition process that makes it possible to consolidate democracy while at the same time combining the two objectives of reconciliation and justice.

Chile regained its democracy nearly 10 years ago. We strictly respect human rights. We attach great importance to national reconciliation and have addressed the dilemma of justice for past human rights violations in our country. This has led to considerable tension.

In Chile there is no denial of justice. We do not accept impunity for human rights violations. The Government has convened a broad dialogue to deal with the aftermath of the most serious human rights violations that took place in our country, specifically the tragedy of those who disappeared while in detention, on which full light was shed by our Truth and Reconciliation Commission. At present, some 300 cases related to human rights violations committed during the authoritarian regime are pending in our courts. In many cases, Chilean courts have handed down guilty verdicts and sentenced the perpetrators to prison terms, which they are now serving.

It seems understandable that the international community should try to render justice in countries lacking the rule of law or where the most basic human rights continue to be violated. But in a democratic State enjoying the rule of law, the task of rendering justice must be undertaken by the country itself and by its institutions.

It is unacceptable to Chile that other countries should claim jurisdiction, directly interfering in this process, which succeeds only in obstructing the process of internal reconciliation and in making a mockery of the process of democratic transition, the basis of which was carefully negotiated and established in a sovereign manner. Such jurisdictional interference, moreover, is untimely and shows a lack of respect for a State based on the rule of law and for its democracy.

My delegation wishes in conclusion to reaffirm Chile's commitment to democracy. In that connection, let me note that we are joining other countries in a new initiative regarding the establishment of a community of democracies.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Bangladesh considers the agenda item entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies" one of the more important items before the General Assembly at its fifty-

fourth session. Bangladesh believes that the United Nations system can play an effective role in the global democratization process and its promotion and consolidation. In fact, the peoples of the world are now increasingly looking to the world body for support and cooperation in this process.

We commend the Secretary-General for his report on this subject (A/53/492) — the fifth since the fiftieth session — which gives us, like the previous ones, a good overview of the activities and efforts of the United Nations system in this field and reviews the overall process of democratization. We thank the Government of Romania for organizing the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development and also for hosting a meeting of experts in Bucharest last May as part of the follow-up process. Such conferences and meetings help reaffirm the effectiveness of democracy as a system of government. They also offer opportunities for exchanges of experiences. Our particular thanks also go to the Romanian delegation here for presenting the draft resolution relating to this subject.

The changes in the international arena provide us with a powerful impetus for the global process of democratization. Bangladesh strongly believes that only democratization can help States in effectively addressing the problems and potentials of today's world. We also believe that democracy and development are inseparable. The First International Conference of Newly Restored Democracies, held in the Philippines in 1988, encouraged many countries of the world to strive for the realization of their people's aspirations for freedom, justice and democracy. The Declaration and Plan of Action endorsed by the Second International Conference, in Nicaragua in 1994, urged the United Nations system's more active involvement in the process. The final document of the Third International Conference, held in Bucharest in September 1997, underlined the role of the United Nations in helping countries meet the challenges they face. We are encouraged to note that the number of participating countries increased from 13 in Manila to 80 in Bucharest. I am confident that our discussion today will assist the world body in defining further its role in supporting the global democratization process.

In Bangladesh, serious and sincere efforts are being made to put in place and strengthen institutions and laws that will reinforce democracy and promote good governance. With a view to promoting social cohesion and integration and ensuring the well-being and

participation of the people, Bangladesh is engaged in decentralization of power to local bodies. In this context, the Government, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has taken the initiative to bring democracy to the grass roots, and the Bangladesh National Parliament has passed bills to introduce decentralization of the central authority, resulting in the transfer of more powers to democratically elected local bodies, such as union, *thana/upazila* and district councils.

Bangladesh believes in the centrality of the right to development within the human rights regime. Social development has remained the main focus of our development strategy. Education, health care and women's empowerment within the broad framework of human development continue to receive priority attention. Rights of women and children are being focused upon. The involvement of civil society in our development and democratization efforts, particularly in the social sector, has been remarkable.

We firmly believe that the United Nations should improve its capacity to respond effectively to the requests of Member States in their efforts to democratize. We are pleased to note that the Advisory Committee on Coordination (ACC), in the context of the 1995 and 1998 reviews undertaken by the United Nations on ways and mechanisms of support, designated focal points for contributing to the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on new or restored democracies. This arrangement should be further institutionalized and made more system-wide. We believe it would be worthwhile to conduct a periodic evaluation of the work of the United Nations in the field of democratization. This would help streamline future Secretariat support for the follow-up mechanism in place since the Bucharest Conference. The United Nations Web site on democratization should also be further developed.

My delegation is happy to note that the follow-up process of the implementation of the recommendations adopted in Bucharest has commenced in the right direction. It will be very relevant to link this up with the implementation of the declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace, in which democracy has been given a very special focus. We are also happy to note that the Fourth International Conference, the first in the new millennium, will take place on the African continent, in Benin. We are confident that the Benin Conference will be able to engage the wisdom and sagacity of African leaders in order to ensure their interaction with other world leaders in order to speed up and widen the process of

democratization, which is fast becoming a global phenomenon.

Ms. Ramírez (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wanted to join in this debate on new or restored democracies because Argentina considers the lessons learned from this process important. The follow-up mechanism provides valuable aid to countries that are restoring democracy or are taking the democratic path for the first time.

On 10 December 1983, my country ended more than a half century of alternating between illegitimate and democratic Governments. Since that date, Argentina has elected a president of the nation four times, strengthened its parliamentary and judicial institutions, re-established a system capable of guaranteeing complete respect for its citizens' rights, thus giving civil society a leading role in the life of the country.

In recent years, Latin America and the Caribbean have accelerated their march towards the full restoration of democracy after several decades in which there was no possibility of living under a system that guaranteed freedom and the independence of political institutions. The change has come quickly and has been significant. The peace process in Central America is an eloquent example of this.

Inter-American institutions have also been changed in accordance with this progress. The Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) was amended to stipulate the incompatibility of authoritarianism with participation in the OAS.

Along with Bolivia and Chile, the four member countries of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) — Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay — reaffirmed that democratic principles and institutions, combined with respect for human rights and social justice, are crucial in order to allow the full development of societies. In this connection, these countries have endorsed instruments that make participation in the system dependent on the existence of a valid democracy.

Although the currents of democratic change of the last two decades have affected the entire world, there are, unfortunately, quite a few cases in which serious conflicts of every kind and situations of extreme poverty hinder the full development of independent political institutions or undermine the progress achieved.

We think it is significant that, on the eve of a new millennium, the fourth Conference will take place in Benin. We welcome the initiative to host that meeting, and we encourage the international community to give it its full support.

In a climate of growing marginalization, human insecurity and inequality, we need to reverse these trends by promoting Governments that refuse to resort to conflict as a means of overcoming problems. In addition, we need to put an end to persistent global poverty, the exclusion of the poorest and serious human rights violations. Societies must benefit from globalization, share positive experiences and act jointly in order to overcome obstacles. In these times, nothing can be achieved in isolation.

Thus, we wonder if this is not the moment to strengthen the relationship between this follow-up mechanism for the new or restored democracies and other important United Nations bodies, so that this experience can be of concrete assistance to countries that are emerging from conflicts or that have just entered the community of nations.

To conclude, we reiterate our belief that pluralistic and open democratic systems are the best way to channel the popular will. The modern approach to development is based not only on public freedoms but also on the responsibilities of States to strengthen their democratic systems, both internally and vis-à-vis the international community. For this reason, we have co-sponsored the draft resolutions introduced here today.

Mr. Legwaila (Botswana): As the new millennium dawns, we are challenged to ponder and reflect on the human dramas — the tragedies and wasted opportunities, intermingled with the many and momentous triumphs of the human spirit — which have been the hallmarks of the century to which I am sure we all bid farewell with a sigh of relief. For this is a century that has spawned some of the most destructive and hated "isms" and ideologies that the genius of the human mind could ever have engineered: Nazism, fascism, totalitarianism, apartheid and many others.

The dawn of the new millennium also beckons us to sharpen our creative imaginations about the future and its boundless opportunities and possibilities. We have survived the ravages of the post-cold-war era and the depredations of the so-called new world order — somewhat bloodied and severely chastened by our lack of perspicacity about the consequences of one of the most cataclysmic happenings in

history: the collapse of communism and the end of the cold war.

Of course, lest I be misunderstood, the new world order has not been all blood, civil wars, the chaotic break-up of nations and the equally chaotic and at times violent birth of new ones. It has given us freedom in many places, from Eastern Europe to southern Africa. Democracy, the multi-party version, is no longer considered or disparaged by the so-called progressives, if they still exist, as a reactionary concept. It has become the popular mode of civilized governance all over the world. Governing people against the will they have expressed in elections open to all today carries a stigma of no mean consequences.

Democracy equals freedom and peace and, in our view, is the only system of governance in or under which sustainable development can take place. But democracy needs concerted nurturing if it is to survive and thrive and create an environment in which sustainable development can take place. The reality is that the overwhelming majority of the new or restored democracies are victims of dire economic circumstances. Their survival will depend to a large extent on the response of the international community to their appeal for assistance and on their ability to satisfy the economic aspirations of their poverty-stricken peoples.

The United Nations electoral assistance programme has played a vital role in buttressing the efforts of the fragile democracies whenever the need for such assistance has been felt. Even the annual adoption of a resolution in this Assembly on United Nations electoral assistance is a welcome demonstration of support for the fledgling democracies.

The conferences of new or restored democracies which have taken place over the past 12 years, with the active encouragement and support of the United Nations, have gone a long way in helping sustain interest in the plight of these democracies. The African continent, whose nations have been very active in the past few years in the search for democratic political dispensations, will have the honour of hosting the next conference in the Republic of Benin in December 2000.

Africa needs the support of the international community if its struggling nations are to stay the course of democratization. Their determination to stay the course cannot be doubted. In Algiers a few months ago, African leaders reaffirmed their momentous decision — first

taken at their summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1997 — to the effect that coups are no longer to be tolerated among members of the Organization of African Unity. Indeed, those who overthrow Governments by force will henceforth be condemned to eternal isolation.

Much has been achieved in the democratization process. What we need now is to consolidate, to ensure that our achievements are not wasted. The new or restored democracies will survive only if they can be given the wherewithal to deepen their roots. Otherwise, they will fall victim to instability and military usurpation.

Mr. Adechi (Benin) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General and congratulate him sincerely on the high quality of the report he has submitted under this agenda item, entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies."

Democracy is a profound aspiration of all peoples. It is a common heritage of the history of humanity, a heritage that each of us is duty-bound to protect and defend everywhere and at all times.

Almost 10 years ago, the people of Benin freely chose democracy as the basis of its politics. Ten years of practice, sanctioned by the peaceful holding of several legislative and presidential elections by which power has been transferred, allow us today to aver that democracy is a demanding, difficult and costly challenge. It requires patient, arduous and sustained apprenticeship. It is also, however, the sole political system that allows each citizen to express his or her political views freely and without fear. It thus offers a framework in which to discuss ideas that promote compromise, tolerance and respect for and acceptance of others, all of which tend to foster concord and a sense of belonging to a unitary society.

Democracy therefore requires the existence of institutions and structures that can enforce the law and establish socio-economic conditions conducive to the full development of the citizen. The regular functioning of these institutions and the organization of the periodic elections that give democracy its vitality require the mobilization of sizable financial resources that are often beyond the budgetary capacities of developing countries. That is why the international community must help the countries concerned in their commitment to the democratic process by providing them, *inter alia*, with the necessary assistance in training electoral personnel to conduct

transparent elections with the necessary skill to minimize contestable results.

I feel it important to recall, however, that, whatever its attractions, no political system can withstand a continual decline in socio-economic conditions. The citizens of our country support the process of democratization because they hope that it will establish conditions leading to improved standards of living. There is a risk, however, that if this hope is dashed, we will witness a return to the demons of the past: dictatorship, civil wars and so on. Clearly, unless the democratization process is accompanied by tangible improvements in the quality of life, it is to be feared that our young democracies will not be consolidated or sustained.

That is why the international community must give special attention to solutions that will strengthen young democracies economically and socially. In this respect, my delegation appeals yet again for an increase in the already appreciable support being provided to the new or restored democracies.

Benin welcomes the outcome of the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Bucharest in September 1997. I take this opportunity to express once again to every State Member of the United Nations the gratitude of my Government for the unanimous support for Benin's candidacy to host the Fourth International Conference on this issue.

Following the Conferences in Manila, the Philippines, in Asia; Managua, Nicaragua, in Central America; and Bucharest, Romania, in Europe, this Conference will be the first such to be held in Africa. My delegation believes that the Conference belongs to all Africa and, in this respect, appeals to the entire international community for total support, which could be taken as a new sign of encouragement for the promotion of the democratic ideal in Africa.

To that end, my country welcomes the agreement recently signed with the United Nations Development Programme in the context of the partial financing of this event, to which the people of Benin look forward as another opportunity to celebrate democracy. Benin also thanks all bilateral and multilateral partners for their future contributions to our Government in the convening of this Conference. The success of the Cotonou Conference, scheduled to take place from 4 to 6 December 2000, will doubtless do credit to the

international community's efforts to consolidate democratic culture throughout the world.

I therefore appeal for the broadest possible participation in this great rally for democracy. We hope that the draft resolution on this item will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Kazhura (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of the Republic of Belarus welcomes consideration at this session of the General Assembly of the item on support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies. We see it as the tireless pursuit of the principles and values formulated at the First International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Manila in 1988; the Second, held in Managua in 1994; and the Third, held in Bucharest in 1997.

The delegation of the Republic of Belarus participated actively in the Bucharest Conference. We consider extremely important the fact that one result of our work was the proposal to draft the Code of Democratic Conduct that is the basis of a draft resolution before the Assembly today. The provisions of this Code, which provide a foundation for the widely recognized norms of democracy and human rights — free and fair elections, the division of authority, strengthening the role of law, the participation of civil society in the development of democracy and the creation of appropriate economic conditions — are fully endorsed by the Government of the Republic of Belarus. This was recently reaffirmed by the President of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, at the Istanbul Summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Code of Democratic Conduct is particularly important for Belarus at a time when our State is beginning to prepare to hold parliamentary and presidential elections. The President and Government of my country are determined to conduct these elections in full keeping with the generally recognized norms of democracy and respect for fundamental human rights. The Code of Democratic Conduct will provide clear guidelines for our State in this context.

Belarus has co-sponsored the two draft resolutions before the General Assembly today. We hope that work will be continued on this issue and are prepared to participate actively in it. The Government of the Republic of Belarus is grateful to the Government of Benin for its initiative to host the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, to be held in Cotonou in the year 2000. We believe that the Benin Conference will be an important contribution to the process of global democratization and to the consolidation of democratic institutions and development.

The Acting President: I wish to inform members that action on draft resolution A/54/L.23 and the amendments thereto, contained in document A/54/L.46, will be taken at a later date to be announced.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.33, entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies".

Before proceeding to take action on the draft resolution, I should like to announce that since its introduction, the following countries have become sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.33: Austria, Belarus, Cameroon, Denmark, Finland, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Ireland, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Monaco, Senegal, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Yemen.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/54/L.33?

Draft resolution A/54/L.33 was adopted (resolution 54/36).

The Acting President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 39.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.



General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

65th plenary meeting

Monday, 29 November 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 44

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/54/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/457)

Draft resolutions (A/54/L.42, A/54/L.43, A/54/L.44, A/54/L.45)

The President: I first give the floor to Mr. Ibra Deguene Ka of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/54/L.42, A/54/L.43, A/54/L.44 and A/54/L.45 in the course of his statement.

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*spoke in French*): I am honoured to speak in this annual debate in the General Assembly on the question of Palestine in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate you once again, Mr. President, on your able stewardship of our work during this session. We are indeed fortunate that you are at the helm of this year's session, and we are certain you will guide our debates in the most productive and efficient manner possible. On behalf of the members and observers of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I wish to express appreciation for your active support of its activities, not only because your country is a member, but also because of your keen personal interest in the Committee's discharge of the mandate entrusted to it by the Assembly.

Your personal involvement in the recent United Nations African Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, held in Namibia this year under the auspices of the Committee, has been especially helpful in ensuring the success of this important regional event crowned by the Windhoek Declaration of support to the Palestinian people.

I also take this opportunity to request you, Mr. President, to convey to Namibia's President Sam Nujoma and Prime Minister Hage Geingob our profound thanks for taking the time to meet with the Committee delegation in Windhoek and for their personal support for and encouragement of the delegation of the Committee.

The international community's position is that the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East cannot be



resolved peacefully without a just solution to the question of Palestine, providing for the full exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The question of Palestine remains the core issue of the conflict in the Middle East.

The Committee welcomes the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, which revived the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and ended a lengthy deadlock that had jeopardized the peace process launched in 1993. That interim agreement brought about encouraging changes, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from parts of the West Bank; the release of 350 Palestinian detainees; agreement on safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; the beginning of construction work on the Gaza sea port; and agreements on some issues relating to the city of Hebron and security issues. The Committee also welcomed the resumption of the permanent status negotiations. We earnestly hope that the parties will be able to conclude the framework agreement and the final settlement agreement in strict compliance with the ambitious timetable they have set.

These positive signals give us reason to believe that the current negotiations are off to a good start and to be reasonably optimistic that progress will continue. We should, however, be mindful of the fact that these are but preliminary steps in a long, arduous process leading towards the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The remaining issues to be tackled by the parties are immense in scope, complex and delicate, and at the present stage the international community should provide more support for these negotiations.

Despite positive signs and the progress made in the peace process, the construction and expansion of settlements is continuing, in flagrant contradiction of the statements of the Israeli authorities that no settlement would be built or extended. In the past year, a relatively new trend in settlement activities started to emerge, with the construction of hilltop settlements throughout the West Bank. Our Committee noted the recent evacuation of some of these settlements, but it wishes to reaffirm firmly and unequivocally its position of principle that all the settlements on Palestinian land are illegal and must be dismantled. They jeopardize the peace process and predetermine the outcome of the permanent status negotiations. These settlements are the symbols of continuing occupation.

Today, the map of the West Bank and East Jerusalem is dotted with settlements alongside Palestinian villages and

towns, in a collage of disparate communities. Palestinians live in communities surrounded by settlement blocks and a network of bypass roads that limit their capacity for economic growth and hamper their ability to maintain normal community life. Settlement activities are acts of provocation, in violation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which contain the basic parameters for the Middle East peace process. It is hardly necessary to point out that settlement-building activities only further exacerbate the already complex problems for which the current peace negotiations are trying to find a solution.

With regard to the Palestinian refugees, it is sad to note that more than 50 years after the partition of Palestine, some 3.6 million Palestinian refugees are still living in camps. These refugees have lived most of their lives — in some cases, their entire lives — in uncertainty as to their future and that of their children. These Palestinians are living with the vague hope that one day perhaps they will be able to return to their homes or obtain compensation for the losses they have suffered. Yet the many obstacles and the years of deprivation and suffering have never broken the will of the Palestinian people. They continue to cherish the belief that the peace process is the only way out of their predicament. Even if they consider that the peace process is an irreversible strategic choice, the Palestinian people, through their perseverance and determination, will not yield or bend until they have obtained what is rightfully theirs: peace and the right to determine their own destiny.

Over the years, the support of the international community for the struggle of the Palestinian people has increased. Many Governments, intergovernmental organizations, non governmental organizations and prominent individuals have rallied to support this noble cause throughout the world. At a time when the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are entering the most difficult phase, it is therefore crucial and essential that all those who support the peace process mobilize their efforts once again to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine so that the Middle East will regain the peace and stability of which it has been deprived for so long. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will remain firmly committed to ensuring that its programme of work will continue effectively, constructively and concretely to support the achievement of the objectives that are the basis of the peace process.

The Committee will also continue to cooperate with all Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations to achieve a just and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine that will one day allow Palestine to take its rightful place in the community of nations as a Member State of the Assembly. Let me also take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to the many Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that have actively supported our work in the course of the year.

The Committee, aware of the fact that economic and social development are important underpinnings of peace and prosperity, has always tried to draw the attention of the international community to the need to provide adequate assistance to the Palestinian people, particularly at this sensitive transitional stage. The Committee would therefore like to thank the international donor community for the economic aid in various areas that it continues to extend to the Palestinian people.

We took note with satisfaction of the signing at the recent meeting in Tokyo, Japan, of an action plan aimed at supporting the peace process and accelerating the disbursement of funds earmarked for essential development projects.

The Committee also took note of the appointment Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. We hope that he will continue to serve as coordinator of the various forms of United Nations assistance to the Palestinian people.

The Committee would like to solemnly reaffirm that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine and that this important responsibility will continue until the question is resolved in all its aspects, in a satisfactory manner and in accordance with international legitimacy. It is for this reason that, as Chairman of the Committee and on behalf of the sponsors, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the four draft resolutions that have been circulated under this agenda item under the symbols A/54/L.42, A/54/L.43, A/54/L.44 and A/54/L.45.

Allow me first, however, to inform the Assembly that in addition to the sponsors whose names appear in those documents, Viet Nam has also joined as a sponsor of the four draft resolutions.

The first three draft resolutions relate, respectively, to the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the work of the Division for Palestinian Rights and the work of the Department of Public Information. They reiterate the important mandates given to those bodies by the General Assembly by large majorities in the past. They also reflect the recent positive developments in the peace process. The focus of these draft resolutions, which are based on the objectives of the Committee, is to intensify the Committee's efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of Palestinian people and the attainment of a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. As in the past, the Committee intends to utilize the resources available to it in the best way possible and to concentrate its efforts on activities that have been effective in the implementation of its mandate. The necessary resources to finance the activities outlined in the three draft resolution are allocated in the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

The fourth draft resolution, on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, which reflects the position of the General Assembly with regard to the essential aspects of such a settlement, has been updated to refer to the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum.

The four draft resolutions that I have just introduced outline positions, mandates and work programmes that are of special importance at the current stage of the peace process. I call on the General Assembly to express its support for these mandates by an even greater majority than in the past.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Walter Balzan of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Balzan (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, having assumed my new functions earlier this year, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee.

In the course of the past year, the Committee continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report covers the new

developments concerning the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee since last year's report.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I and outlines the Committee's position with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

Chapters II and III summarize the mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine as monitored by the Committee in the course of 1999. This chapter takes note of a number of encouraging steps in the peace process since the signing on 4 September 1999 of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. In particular, it refers to the further Israeli redeployment from parts of the West Bank, the beginning of the permanent status negotiations, the release of Palestinian prisoners, the agreement on the safe passage routes and the timetable for the conclusion of a framework agreement and final settlement agreement. It also contains reference to the convening on 15 July 1999 of the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention on Measures to Enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. The Chapter draws special attention to the serious problem posed by the settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. It also contains information on settler activities, the situation with regard to the Palestinian prisoners, the Palestinian economy, and water resources available to the Palestinians; action by the donor community and the United Nations system; and the activities and budget constraints of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Chapter V reviews action taken by the Committee. It is divided into three main sections. Section A describes action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/39, aimed at promoting Palestinian rights in the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies. This includes information on the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and communications to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General. This section also includes information on the participation by the Committee Chairman in various international forums.

Section B contains an account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 53/39 and 53/40, respectively. It also takes note of the meetings of consultations of the Bureau of the Committee with members of the European Union and with the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Sir Kieran Prendergast. The section gives a brief account of the various international meetings organized in the course of the year, namely the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference, held in Rome on 18 and 19 February 1999; the United Nations African Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, held at Windhoek from 20 to 22 April 1999; and the United Nations International Meeting on the Convening of the Conference on Measures to Enforce the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, held in Cairo on 14 and 15 June 1999.

The section contains an account of a visit by the Committee delegation to Gaza, from 16 to 18 June 1999, and of the meetings held in the course of the visit with Chairman Arafat and other high-level Palestinian officials. A subsection on the Committee's cooperation with non-governmental organizations has been added to this chapter. The rest of Section B deals with the publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority, the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and the project on the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine.

In view of the special importance attached to the need to support the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority, a new section C was added to describe action taken in implementation of General Assembly resolution 53/27.

Chapter VI covers the work of the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/41, including the publications and audiovisual activities of the Department, the work of United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) worldwide and other activities carried out by the Department.

The seventh and last chapter contains the recommendations of the Committee to the General

Assembly. In this chapter, the Committee notes that, recent breakthroughs in the peace process notwithstanding, the Palestinian people still carry the heavy burden of occupation. It also notes that a solution to the Palestine refugee question, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, is yet to be achieved. The Committee draws attention to the fact that the territory under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority now represents a disjointed multitude of enclaves surrounded by settlements, restricting the freedom of movement of the Palestinians and severely affecting their livelihood. It expresses concern that, over the years, this has had a damaging effect on the Palestinian economy and is likely to have an impact on the sustainability of the social and economic development of the Palestinian people, including its efforts at nation-building.

The Committee reaffirms its strong support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. It welcomes the resumption of the negotiations on permanent status issues and expresses the hope that they will be conducted in compliance with the timetable agreed in the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. The Committee also maintains that at this crucial juncture, the international community, and in particular the co-sponsors of the peace process, should spare no effort in order to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, as well as peace and stability to the entire region.

The Committee expresses concern about the situation on the ground, with the occupying Power continuing to create "facts on the ground" and to violate the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It stresses the paramount importance for the international community, including the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, to do everything in their power to protect the Palestinian people until the parties reach a permanent status agreement and it is fully implemented.

The Committee reaffirms the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with respect to the question of Palestine until a satisfactory settlement based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy is reached and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized.

The Committee also expresses the view that the adjustments made over the past year in the programme of meetings held, under its auspices, in the various regions, and in its cooperation with the non-governmental organization community made the programme more effective and focused. The Committee pledged to continue

to review and assess this programme with a view to making it more effective and responsive to the evolving situation.

The Committee further notes that, in the course of the year, it has placed special emphasis on its programme of activities on supporting and promoting the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority. The Committee intends to continue this important activity in order to ensure broad international support for the Project, as well as active international participation in the millennial celebrations in Bethlehem.

The Committee emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights in support of the Committee's objectives and requests the Division to continue its programme of publications and other activities, including the completion of its work on the UNISPAL collection and on the project for the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine.

The Committee notes that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has continued to be an important tool in informing the media and public opinion on issues relating to the question of Palestine, and would request that it be continued, with the necessary flexibility as may be required by developments affecting the question of Palestine.

Finally, in an effort to make its contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee calls on all States to join in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in facilitating its deliberations on this important issue.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to take the floor and to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over the General Assembly. Your election is a tribute to the struggle of the friendly people of Namibia, and its leadership in achieving liberation and independence. We wish Namibia success in its endeavours to ensure the welfare of its people and the continued development and prosperity of that country. We are confident of your ability to conduct the work of

this session of the General Assembly, and believe that it will crown with success the endeavours of the United Nations in establishing peace and security throughout the world.

We also thank your predecessor, Mr. Didier Operti, who presided over the meetings of the previous session with outstanding competence. We would like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his worthy efforts and serious endeavours to resolve outstanding international questions and problems with the aim of maintaining international peace and security and achieving social and economic development for all the peoples of the world.

We would also like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, for their persistent efforts in support of the struggle of the Palestinian people to end the Israeli occupation and its effects on the Palestinian territories.

The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed numerous tragedies and crises in various regions and countries of the world. The United Nations has made a considerable effort in discharging its duties towards those countries, and has dealt positively with the majority of such crises. The Organization was originally established with the aim of maintaining international peace and security and political stability, ensuring human rights, ending conflicts and wars and finding mechanisms to promote socio-economic development and friendly relations among nations on the basis of respect for the principle of equal rights of peoples and their right to self-determination. However, the United Nations did not empower any single State or group of States to act unilaterally, outside the framework of the United Nations, to deal with international disputes. No State is excepted from its resolutions; any State that is the subject of a resolution must abide by and implement its provisions.

For more than half a century, the General Assembly has been preoccupied on an annual basis with the question of Palestine, which is the crux of the Israeli-Arab conflict — a conflict that has jeopardized peace, security and stability in the Middle East. The General Assembly, and the Security Council in particular, have adopted several resolutions and held a number of international conferences on the subject. Regrettably, all of them have failed — or, rather, they were made to fail — because Israel, and those who support it, refuse to respect the principles of international legitimacy or to implement United Nations resolutions, engaging instead in procrastination and stalling.

The Charter clearly provides for the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the lands of others by force or through war. That principle was unanimously endorsed by Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which called for the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. In subsequent resolutions, including 252 (1968), 465 (1980), 478 (1980) and 681 (1990), the Security Council identified and defined these regions, which are Palestinian and other Arab territories, including Al-Quds, occupied by Israel in 1967.

In this regard, I cannot fail to recall the report that the State Department of the United States submitted to Congress, which defined those areas as being the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights. We therefore call upon Israel, the occupying Power and a Member of the United Nations, to abide by the principles of internationally binding resolutions and the provisions of the Charter, which are clear in this regard. Members of the United Nations commit themselves to abiding by Security Council resolutions and to implementing them in accordance with the Charter. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) provides for the need to achieve a just resolution of the problem of refugees. The Council debated the question of the situation resulting from the Israeli aggression of 1967. The Council distinguished between the refugees of 1948 and those displaced in 1967, adopting resolution 237 (1967) in respect of those Palestinians who were displaced and calling for their return to the regions where the military operations of 1967 had taken place.

In conformity with this position, the Declaration of Principles, signed in September 1993 between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Government of Israel, provided for the return of the displaced persons. A quadripartite committee was formed, made up of representatives of Palestine, Israel, Egypt and Jordan, with the aim of arriving at modalities to facilitate the readmission of persons displaced from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967. However, Israel impeded the work of that committee and froze its meetings by failing to attend. The displaced persons, who number about 800,000, are still suffering from the scourge and tragedy of displacement and are denied admission to their territory. That is how Israel respects the resolutions of the Security Council and the articles of the bilateral agreements concluded with the other parties.

I should now like to discuss the question of the refugees. Count Bernadotte, the United Nations Mediator

in Palestine, who was assassinated by Jewish terrorist gangs in 1948, stated in a progress report that the displacement of the Palestinian Arabs was the result of panic stemming from conflict in the areas where the fighting was concentrated and from rumours stemming from alleged or real acts of expulsion and terrorism. On the basis of the recommendations of Count Bernadotte, the General Assembly adopted resolution 194 (III), which included among its major provisions the requirement that those refugees wishing to return to their homes should be permitted to do so at the earliest practical date and that compensation should be paid for the property of those who chose not to return.

A procedure for the speedy return of the Palestinian refugees to their homeland must be established in line with their rights under resolution 194 (III) of 1948. Settlement outside Palestine would require the consent of the Palestinian people, who insist on returning to their homeland and their property. Moreover, settlement is broadly opposed in neighbouring Arab countries, particularly those that for more than 50 years have been shouldering the burden of the Palestinian diaspora. Following the second Gulf war, in March 1991, the former President of the United States, Mr. George Bush, undertook a political initiative that was accepted by the Arabs and by Israel: that of convening the Madrid Peace Conference. That initiative was based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace with a view to achieving peace and security for the States of the region and guaranteeing the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people.

After nearly two years of difficult negotiations in Washington, there was no tangible progress owing to the intransigence of the then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Then a new Government took power, and the Declaration of Principles was signed following negotiations in Oslo. The two parties to the Declaration of Principles signed at Washington on 13 September 1993 agreed to negotiations in two stages: transitional and permanent status stages. The Declaration stipulated that the aim of the negotiations on permanent status was to implement Security Council resolution 242 (1967). The two parties agreed to the following topics of the permanent-status negotiations: Al-Quds, refugees, settlements, borders and water.

The purpose of the transitional period was to avoid giving Israel an additional opportunity to pursue its policy of land expropriation and the building of new settlements. But Israel continued to pursue that policy and other ugly practices. This prompted United States Secretary of State

Madeleine Albright to acknowledge that Israel's policy could destroy the peace process. It has been more than five years since the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Israel is still stalling and refusing to implement the provisions of those agreements relating to such matters as transfer of powers, the process of so-called redeployment, the release of detainees and prisoners and the return of displaced persons.

Both sides have agreed that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are a single territorial unit, but, by artificially linking Gaza with the West Bank, the Barak Government is trying to consecrate their separation. A result of the dismemberment of Palestinian lands has been the establishment of geographically disjointed bantustans within the occupied West Bank. This will inevitably lead to a disturbing situation detrimental to the establishment of peace.

As members know, the General Assembly, by resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, approved the recommendation that Palestine be partitioned into two States, an Arab State and a Jewish State. That same recommendation also proposed boundaries for the two States. But Israel rushed to seize by force a great part of the territory that had been allocated to the Palestinian Arab State. It continued its gradual occupation until 1967, when it occupied every inch of the land of the Arab State of Palestine, and when by force and war it seized territories belonging to neighbouring Arab countries. At that point, the Security Council adopted its resolution 242 (1967), which reaffirmed the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and called for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from the areas occupied during the 1967 aggression. That resolution stressed the importance of recognizing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries.

On 25 March 1999, the heads of State or Government of the European Union reaffirmed their support for the peace process on the basis of land for peace, with a view to guaranteeing collective and individual security for the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples. They affirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including the option of establishing a sovereign State of their own; they called upon both parties to seek a solution that would not prejudice that right — a right which no one has the power to veto — and they expressed their belief that the

establishment of a democratic State of Palestine would be the best safeguard for Israel's security and would ensure that Israel is accepted as a peer by other States of the region.

Mr. Barak won the recent Israeli elections and made his position clear when, standing at the graveside of Yitzhak Rabin, he said that there would be no return to the 1967 borders and no foreign army west of the Jordan river. That means that he wants no border of the State of Palestine to be contiguous with any other Arab State. He also emphasized that Israel would continue to exercise sovereignty over the West Bank settlements and would hold on to a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty as the "eternal capital" of Israel. Then, Mr. Barak paid his first visit to Washington, where he met for hours with President Clinton. The Israeli newspaper *Ha-aretz* reported that strategic cooperation between the two States was strengthened and that the leaders had reaffirmed support for Israeli defence and deterrence and for joint strategic planning.

How are we going to explain this American-Israeli cooperation, its effect on the peace process and its revival? The paper quoted Mr. Barak's statement to Mr. William Cohen, the United States Secretary of Defense:

"The trend towards peace is conditional upon our economic and military power; whether we succeed in achieving peace or not, it is important that we know that we are proceeding from a position of strength".

America provided Israel with fifty F-16 aircraft.

As for peace with Syria, Mr. Barak said:

"The compromise solutions which we can accept in negotiations with Syria will become clear after knowing what President Assad will provide as far as Lebanon and terrorism, the question of water, the opening of embassies, borders, security arrangements, early warning systems and the kind of economic cooperation are concerned".

Barak volunteered to explain President Clinton's statement regarding the right of Palestinian refugees to live in safety in places of their choice. Making a point that there was a misunderstanding of Clinton's statement, Barak said:

"Our position is clear. I do not believe that any refugee under any conditions can return to Israel. It is better to achieve solutions for the refugees in the places where they live now".

Do these positions indicate peaceful intentions? In commenting on the establishment of a Palestinian State, Barak said that he will "discuss with the Palestinians the entity in which they will live in the general context of the questions that are subject to negotiations".

Occupation and annexation of territory by force cannot be accepted as a point of departure for peaceful solutions. Human rights, rather, the rights of all citizens, cannot be bought or sold. No State or Government can co-opt this right or dispose of it. Hence, the Palestinian refugees have legitimate rights that they must exercise.

As for Al-Quds (Jerusalem), it is the cradle of the three major religions. It is the crux of the conflict in the region, the treasure of nations and the cornerstone in the peace process. Finding a just solution to the question of Al-Quds will achieve comprehensive peace and security in the Middle East.

The General Assembly in its resolution 181 (II) recommended the establishment of a *corpus separatum* for the city of Al-Quds. On the other hand, in March 1948 the Security Council took up the situation in Al-Quds, called for a ceasefire and decided to establish a subsidiary committee to reconsider the draft resolution relevant to Al-Quds.

The first step for the success of the peace process is the acceptance by Israel of its adherence to the Security Council resolutions that form the basis of the current negotiations, that is, the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and withdrawal from all the territories it occupied in 1967 so as to allow the Palestinian people to exercise their sovereignty over these territories. We are confident that a sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital and the State of Israel will find an acceptable solution under international guarantees to preserve the political, humanitarian and religious dimensions of the city of Al-Quds, the key to peace.

Following this detailed discussion, one must wonder about the role of the United States, the sponsor of the peace process. We notice on the basis of experience that the United States slacks off in prompting Israel to honour its commitments. The proof of that is that seven years of

negotiations have elapsed without achieving the required accomplishment on the Palestinian track, while there is a complete stalemate on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Mr. Netanyahu acknowledged this in the Israeli Knesset on 18 November 1998 when he stated:

"I would like to say something about our American friends. The United States has devoted major efforts to cooperate with us, to reduce the level of Palestinian demands. The Palestinians have started by calling for a redeployment from 35 per cent of the land. We reduced that to 25 per cent. Then the American proposals reduced that to 13 per cent, of which 3 per cent has been set aside as a natural protectorate."

This proves that the United States was pressuring the Palestinian side to acquiesce to Israeli demands instead of pressuring Israel. The United States is capable, no doubt, of pressuring Israel into withdrawing from all Arab territories occupied in 1967. Such pressure was already applied and bore fruit during the second Gulf war when the United States ordered Yitzhak Rabin, the former Prime Minister of Israel, not to make any movements, and he obeyed. Mr. Barak is trying to manipulate the tracks with the goal of creating contradictions between them through international mediation and illusory projects. The Lebanese President, Mr. Emile Lahoud, defined Lebanon's position by saying:

"If they want to withdraw without a just and comprehensive solution, then peace will not have been established in the region. Our position in Lebanon is based on persuasion, and we cannot accept a solution without withdrawal from Lebanon and Syria and without the exercise by the Palestinians of their right to return to their land. The right of return is a sacred right; hence, our decision is final."

This clearly means that the three Arab tracks are closely interrelated.

The Palestine Liberation Organization is still on the list of terrorist organizations in the United States Congress, based on a decision taken by the Congress in 1988, even though Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed to mutual recognition a few years ago. But the presence of the Palestine Liberation Organization on the terrorist list is a means of bringing pressure to bear on it to accept the policy of *fait accompli* pursued by Israel. Numerous European States have raised the level of

representation of the Palestine Liberation Organization. But America has kept our office in Washington without an official representational character, and the United States President has to ask permission of the United States Congress every six months to deal with the Palestine Liberation Organization or with the Palestinian National Authority.

It is high time to lift the unjust embargo imposed against the Iraqi people and to put an end to the American/British raids on Iraq which claim the lives of tens of victims every day. These acts of aggression go beyond the rules of international law and order, breach peace and security in the region and consecrate a state of concern and political instability in the Middle East. They create a climate of non-credibility in United States efforts for the success of the Middle East peace process.

The creation of the Palestinian State is not an end in itself. The Palestinian people must exercise its sovereignty over its territories occupied in 1967 on the basis of the right of people to self-determination without foreign intervention.

Commitment to resolutions of international legitimacy and to their implementation creates the proper climate for peaceful coexistence and international friendly cooperation and conciliation. The balance of interests among the parties concerned is the best way to achieve a peaceful settlement. Moreover, preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, the subjection of nuclear facilities to the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the signing of the NPT are the best way to ensure peaceful coexistence. The creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict are the keys to peace in the Middle East. Now is an opportune time to achieve peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the Middle East. But if the policy of double standards continues, and if the United Nations is unable to participate actively in the search for just solutions, this opportunity to achieve peace and political stability will be lost and the region will be overwhelmed by new threatening conflicts.

Mr. Bouah-Kamon (Côte d'Ivoire), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Ms. Rasi (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia,

Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Liechtenstein, align themselves with this statement.

There is real momentum towards peace and towards real progress on the Palestinian track of the peace process. This fall we have already witnessed two significant steps forward: the signature of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and the resumption of the permanent status talks. The European Union strongly supported the agreement and welcomed both steps. The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum puts implementation of the earlier agreements back on track. It provides an ambitious timetable for negotiating a permanent end to the long-standing conflict between the two peoples.

These steps required courage and determination on the part of the two leaders: Prime Minister Barak and President Arafat. The outcome was largely a result of direct negotiations between the parties. This is a significant new reality. It bodes well for the next steps of the process and thus also for the question being discussed today.

The progress made so far in implementing the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum is welcome. The two releases of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of the southern safe-passage route and the first Israeli redeployment have been a measure in rebuilding trust between the parties. However, there have also been difficulties. The negotiations on the northern safe-passage route are not progressing as planned. The second Israeli redeployment has been delayed, as has engaging in the actual negotiations on final status issues. The European Union would like to take this opportunity to call upon the international community to lend its full support to this promising but critical phase in the peace process.

The inauguration of the Gaza airport in November last year was an important milestone in the economic cooperation between the parties, and the European Union warmly welcomed it. We now call upon the parties to complete negotiations, within the agreed time-frame, on remaining economic issues, especially those regarding the industrial zone in Karni and the Gaza port. In this context, the European Union strongly insists on the need to abstain from any acts that could prejudice the final outcome of the negotiations or harm the atmosphere. Israeli settlement activities, including house demolitions, continue to be of concern to the European Union, which considers them illegal and an obstacle to peace.

The European Union also stresses the importance of the commitment to the principles of democracy and the respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The implementation of the measures recommended in the report of the Council on Foreign Relations and the signing of the tripartite action plan are significant steps in this direction.

The visits by President Ahtisaari and Foreign Minister Halonen, as representatives of the European Union, underline the European Union's unwavering support for the peace process and its determination to stay actively engaged in advancing it. The European Union will continue to make constructive and effective contributions — including through its special envoy, Ambassador Moratinos — in order to restore and strengthen confidence between the parties. We are ready to be fully associated with the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and to contribute to the issues discussed in the final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

The European Union underlines the importance of progress in the peace process with a view to improving, *inter alia*, investor confidence and to promoting sustainability and greater self-sufficiency of the Palestinian economy. The European Union reaffirms its resolution to continue its economic and technical assistance. We will especially concentrate on helping to build a sound and prosperous economy in the Palestinian territory, so as to facilitate social and political stability for the Palestinians. Economic cooperation between the countries in the region, and between those countries and the European Union, would cement a genuine peace.

With regard to support for the Palestinian people, we would also like to mention the new, tenth Convention between the European Commission and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East that was signed in October. The new Convention contains important contributions to education, health, relief and social programmes.

In concluding, the European Union reiterates its firm commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement based on the Madrid and Oslo accords. We are determined to fully assist the parties — if they so wish — in their efforts to bring about lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should have liked my statement on the question of

Palestine, under consideration by the General Assembly today, to be optimistic, following the conclusion of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum that ended the stalemate in the peace process brought about by the policies of the former Israeli Government. Regrettably, the current Israeli Government's approach to the question of the settlements in the occupied territories gives me no cause for optimism. Rather, it threatens the peace process and could even prevent it from resolving a conflict that has lasted over half a century.

It is noteworthy that, between July and September of this year — a period of no more than three months — the Israeli Government added 2,600 new settler units, whereas the former Government approved no more than 3,000 new units in the course of an entire year. This makes it perfectly clear that the policy of the current Israeli Government on settlements is inconsistent with its declared desire to achieve a genuine peace with the Palestinians and its Arab neighbours. The former Government initiated the construction of a settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim in Arab East Jerusalem only three weeks after the signing of the agreement on Al-Khalil. The current Government began the construction of the new settler units three weeks after the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. The decision to build the settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim prompted the international community to criticize the Government of Israel and to put the peace process on hold for 18 months. Will history repeat itself? We hope not.

In order to justify the establishment of these units on lands that should be returned to their legitimate owners in the final status phase, Israel claims that the current expanded settlements need to grow naturally. This is not true at all. All experts state that the growth rate should be no higher than 2 per cent. One settlement will be expanded by an additional 1,100 units, although it currently contains only 2,000. This so-called natural expansion is thus occurring at a rate of 55 per cent.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Palestinian reaction to this increased settler activity should be extremely negative. President Arafat has condemned the expansion, describing it as destructive to the peace process. Addressing the international community and the United Nations, represented by the Secretary-General, he described Israel's action as a seizure of Palestinian land and a usurpation of Palestinian rights. The Israeli Government must take a clear stance and declare its readiness to rescind all its settlement resolutions and decisions, especially those adopted by the Ministry of Housing.

These continued settlement activities, coming at a time when the international community is tirelessly seeking to support the peace process in the Middle East, are unacceptable and inconsistent with logic and justice. They do not reflect a desire to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement. They are also inconsistent with Israel's international commitments.

At its forty-third session, in resolution 43/177, the General Assembly acknowledged the proclamation of the State of Palestine by the Palestinian National Council on 5 November, 1988 and affirmed the need to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their sovereignty over their territory occupied since 1967. At its last session, in resolution 53/42, the General Assembly stressed the necessity for commitment to the principle of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process. It also stressed the need for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination.

The establishment of the State of Israel and its subsequent occupation of the Palestinian territories severely harmed the Palestinian economy. The consistent Israeli practice of stifling the Palestinian economy by closing the territories under any pretext resulted in a serious decline of the Palestinian gross national product, a huge increase in the rate of unemployment and damage to the tune of billions of dollars to the economy. The international community must therefore support and improve the Palestinian economy, thus enabling it to grow and enabling the Palestinian people to live in dignity and prosperity on their national soil.

Mr. Jasni (Malaysia): My delegation is pleased to participate in the debate on the question of Palestine in this meeting of the Assembly today, coinciding with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. My delegation believes that it is important for the international community to continue to remind itself on this day of the still unresolved issue of Palestine and of its responsibility to support the peace process.

My delegation welcomes the recent Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum between Palestine and Israel and fervently hopes that it will pave the way towards a final settlement of the Palestine-Israel issue and, beyond that, to the resolution of the entire Arab-Israeli question. We are happy that the signing of this Memorandum allowed for

a resumption of the peace process that had been suspended by the former Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Netanyahu, since last September. We are hopeful that the change in stance on the part of Mr. Barak, the new Prime Minister, showing willingness to continue with peace talks on the basis of the land-for-peace formula, will give new impetus to the peace process. The Palestinians have demonstrated their commitment to the peace process and would expect nothing less than a similar commitment by the Israelis. Indeed, it is the expectation of the international community that, this time around, all of the agreements solemnly arrived at between the two sides will be implemented without further hitch.

It is therefore with dismay that we note that the new Government of Israel issued 2,600 tenders for settlement construction in the occupied territories during its first 3 months, as compared to an average of 3,000 a year under the Netanyahu Government. Needless to say, this does not contribute to generating the kind of confidence among Palestinians which is essential for the final resolution of the Palestinian issue. It contributes only to reinforcing the sense of cynicism on the part of the people of Palestine, who remember too well the history of broken promises and unfulfilled pledges of the provisions contained in the Oslo and Wye River agreements. Clearly, given the less than exemplary record of past Israeli Governments in living up to their treaty commitments with the Palestinians, the onus lies with the Government of Prime Minister Ehud Barak to ensure that the deal hammered out at Sharm el-Sheikh will be kept with no further equivocations or prevarications.

My delegation calls on Israel to conduct its ongoing negotiations with the Palestinian side in good faith dictated by the need to resolve the issue once and for all and in the best interests of all concerned. Every effort should be made to pursue the goals of peace, security and cooperation cherished by all in the region. We call on all the parties to implement in full their commitments under existing agreements and to refrain from actions that could jeopardize the success of the negotiations. It is therefore imperative for the international community to encourage the parties concerned to keep their negotiations at this crucial stage on track so as to ensure the final resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli issue within the expected time-frame.

Now more than ever the United Nations has an important role to play to ensure the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily their right to self-determination. The United Nations must continue to be involved in the peace process, both as the guardian of international legitimacy and in the mobilization

and provision of international assistance for development. The work of the United Nations agencies and committees particularly devoted to the Palestinian issues, such as the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, must continue to be supported.

UNRWA, which takes care of some 3.6 million Palestinian refugees, must be provided with sufficient funding to carry out its work, while the two committees must be allowed to continue their mandates to support the Palestinian people in their quest for the realization of their inalienable rights and to highlight to the outside world the plight of the Palestinian people living in the occupied territories. My delegation has been a traditional co-sponsor of the four draft resolutions pertaining to these matters which are being considered under this agenda item and is pleased to be so again this year.

For peace to take root and flourish, my delegation believes that it must be accompanied by economic growth and development and improvement in the social and living conditions of the people. We call on the international donor community to continue to provide support for the rehabilitation of the Palestinian economy and to ensure that the socio-economic development of the Palestinian society continues to be viable and sustainable.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to reaffirm Malaysia's continued strong commitment to and unwavering support for the Palestinian people and their leadership. Malaysia will continue to support the Palestinians in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination, including the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State in their homeland in the near future. We are confident that under the able and wise leadership of President Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian people will triumph in their indefatigable endeavours in realizing that objective. It is imperative for the international community to lend its resolute support to the Palestinian leadership and people in their unrelenting and peaceful quest for justice, freedom and independence. We look forward to the day in the new millennium when the Palestinian people and the refugees in the Middle East region can truly enjoy a just, comprehensive and lasting peace.

My delegation fervently hopes that the long quest by the Palestinian people for statehood will be finally realized soon in fulfilment of their expectations. Malaysia looks forward to welcoming the State of Palestine into the international community in the near future.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): Today, on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to reiterate once more the support of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Palestinian people and their just cause.

During the past 50 years, the international community has witnessed the Palestinian people being uprooted from their homeland, dispersed into exile and stripped of their rights. Attempts have been made to negate their existence altogether. The question of Palestine remains the oldest question in our contemporary world, and we still witness continuation of such Israeli practices as the construction of settlements, the confiscation of lands, the destruction and confiscation of Palestinian homes and properties, the desecration of the holy places, unjustified detention and torture of detainees. The refugee status of millions of Palestinians who live in the diaspora and in refugee camps under precarious conditions has been perpetuated.

The conditions in the occupied territories are a serious violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Security Council has confirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, in 25 resolutions. Many of those resolutions call upon Israel, the occupying Power, to comply with the provisions of the Convention and to accept its *de jure* applicability. The General Assembly, by an overwhelming majority of Member States at the tenth emergency special session, on 9 February 1999, and the recent Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, held on 15 July 1999, reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, and reiterated the need for full respect for its provisions. Unfortunately, the efforts of the international community in forcing the Israeli regime to observe humanitarian laws in the occupied territories have produced no result.

The international outrage against and condemnation of Israel have not changed the pattern of its inhuman behaviour towards the Palestinians and its illegal policies in the occupied territories. The Israeli regime has with impunity trampled upon the most fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-

determination, which has, as a result, driven millions of people into the diaspora. By the same token, the policy of expanding Jewish settlements and the process of judaization of Al-Quds al-Sharif, which is of paramount importance to the entire Islamic world, continue to be in force, regardless of the fact that they are illegal and constitute a flagrant violation of the resolutions of the United Nations and international law. Moreover, the imposition of countless repressive measures, such as detention, deportation, home demolition and other forms of collective punishment against the Palestinian people in the occupied territories has continued. The continuation of repressive measures has attracted the attention, as well as the condemnation, of the international community. The Israeli regime should be forced to heed the call of the world community to put an end to the infamous practice of collective punishment.

The Israeli regime has always tried to neutralize the United Nations and to greatly limit its involvement in the question of Palestine. In fact, the real aim has been to dissociate the Palestinian issue from international law and legitimacy, including the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. However, the United Nations, as the only universal and most representative body of the international community, has a permanent responsibility to tackle the Palestinian issue, with a view to bringing peace and justice to a region marked by enduring crises and engulfed in a whirlpool of constant tension and destructive confrontation for more than half a century.

The Israeli actions and policies are undoubtedly the main source of instability and insecurity in the region; they thus create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety among the peoples of the region as well as in the entire international community. The current situation in the Middle East continues to be scarred by wounds and injustice as a result of the Israeli expansionist policy. The continued occupation of Palestine, southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan, in contravention of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, represents a persistent Israeli policy of domination and aggression.

The failure of the current diplomatic efforts known as the Middle East peace process to take into account the root causes of the crisis — namely, the organized occupation of Palestinian lands and the forced mass expulsion of its inhabitants — not only prevents the restoration of the inalienable rights of the oppressed people of Palestine, but also leads to further negligence of their rights. It also provides Israel with another

opportunity to continue without concern its policies of occupation, suppression and invasion against Palestinians and other nations of the region. We believe that the root causes of the question of Palestine must be addressed if we are to find a just solution to the problems in the Middle East.

In this context, we believe that a comprehensive and just solution to the issue of Palestine lies in the restoration of all rights of the Palestinian people, including the return of all Palestinian refugees and displaced persons to their homeland, the full and free exercise of their right to self-determination and the liberation of all occupied territories.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): In 1961 in Belgrade, the First Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement declared its support for the full restoration of all the rights of the Arab people of Palestine in conformity with the United Nations Charter and United Nations resolutions. Almost four decades later, this commitment remains valid. The long-standing and traditional solidarity of the Movement in favour of a durable solution to the question of Palestine is unwavering and unchanging.

At the twelfth Non-Aligned Movement summit in South Africa in September last year, the heads of State or Government reaffirmed support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to return to their homeland and to have their own independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital; and the withdrawal of Israel, the occupying Power, from all of the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the other Arab territories occupied since 1967. The Movement furthermore reaffirmed its position on occupied East Jerusalem, the illegal Israeli settlements, and the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to all the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. These positions were repeated by the Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement in New York in September this year.

South Africa supports the struggle of the Palestinian people. We firmly believe that the achievement of their inalienable right to self-determination and independence is pivotal for the achievement of a sustained and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. South Africa, which has recognized the State of Palestine and has established full diplomatic relations, has been a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People since 1997. We stated to the Committee in 1997,

"The struggle and sacrifices of our people against apartheid could not but inspire us to support the fight of the Palestinian people for self-determination and the establishment of an independent State."

The Committee, under the able leadership of Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, as an organ established by the Assembly to deal with the question of Palestine, continues to have an important role during this transitional period.

In collaboration with the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, the Committee serves to increase international awareness of the question of Palestine. At this historic juncture for the Palestinian people, the continued support of the United Nations, its organizations and its agencies cannot be underestimated.

We welcome the report of the Committee, contained in document A/54/35, submitted to the Assembly. One of the important functions of the Committee is to provide a forum for discussion for Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. South Africa had the opportunity to participate as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement at the important international conferences held under the auspices of the Committee this year. In Windhoek, Namibia, the role of African members of the Movement in the struggle against colonialism and foreign occupation was emphasized. We stressed the significant role of African member States in the promotion of self-determination and the desire for the creation of a world based on tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

The Meeting in Cairo, Egypt, expressed concern at the illegal settlement activities by Israel in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Moreover, there was a call for all efforts to be made to enhance respect for international humanitarian law established for the protection of civilian persons in time of war. It is incumbent upon the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to do their utmost to respect and to ensure respect for that Convention.

It is heartening to note the unanimous support of the international community earlier this month for the Assembly resolution entitled "Bethlehem 2000". South Africa is of the view that the creation of a strong, self-sufficient and sustainable economic infrastructure for Bethlehem, Palestine, would provide a sound

underpinning for social and political stability — a prerequisite for peace.

South Africa firmly believes that peaceful negotiation is the only means of ensuring lasting peace, security and stability in the region. We welcome the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum in September between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. It is our fervent hope that the current peace process efforts to reach a final settlement between the Palestinian and Israeli sides will continue with renewed vigour.

This morning, the United Nations commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, issued a strong statement of the Movement's continued support for the peace process. President Mbeki called upon the international community

"to remain steadfast in its commitment and support for a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the realization of the legitimate rights of all Palestinians".

Endorsing the resolutions before us today would send a clear message that, until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached, the question of Palestine remains the permanent responsibility of the United Nations.

Mr. Lancry (Israel): (*spoke in French*): Since the Oslo accords, Israeli-Palestinian relations have been developing in one of the most notably promising areas.

This relationship between Palestinians and Israelis, long disturbed by the Middle East conflict and its tragic succession of wars and violence, is now free of the profoundly devastating burdens of the past. Today, it shows the main features of peace between our two peoples.

The major turning point represented by the accords of 13 September 1993, sealed by the dazzling image of the historic handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat in Washington, marked, from the Israeli-Palestinian viewpoint, support for a new beginning. This is nothing less than a shift from the frozen attitude of reciprocal alienation and denial to a logic of peace in which the emergence and acceptance of the other side become essential. In diplomatic language, this is called mutual recognition, which is what Israelis and Palestinians agreed to in Oslo.

Mutual recognition is no doubt the high point and the main axis of the development of Israeli-Palestinian peace. In it the walls of rejection collapse and are transmuted into a space of acceptance, dialogue and the self-advancement of two peoples. Mutual recognition, with its permanent expansion, is a prodigious tool for rooting the peace process deeply and making it irreversible. An incontestable driving force, it is capable of transcending ideological circumstances and political changes, as well as the often violent contradictions inherent in the transition from an old to a new order.

Thus, we have seen in Israel, since the signing of the Oslo accords, politics and ideology changing in the light of the democratic choices made, without the foundation of these accords — namely, mutual recognition between Israelis and Palestinians — being jeopardized. Beyond that, even the former Government, that of Benjamin Netanyahu, which arose out of opposition to the spirit and letter of Oslo, in exercising its functions had to submit to the powerful force of conversion brought about by mutual recognition. The signing of the Hebron accords in January 1997 and the Wye River Memorandum in October 1998 embody the thrust and considerable scope of integration and political socialization that are implied in mutual recognition.

The present Government, led by Ehud Barak, whose actions and policies were quickly expressed through the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, constitutes, in the pluralistic range of its political components, a majority acquired through the growing virtues of mutual recognition.

I have taken the trouble in my inaugural statement to the United Nations to celebrate the philosophical foundation par excellence of the peace process. I have done so at the expense of repetition, indeed, to the point of an anaphoric blizzard of the idea of mutual recognition, because through it we touch the very heart of living power and the germ of real reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Peace between peoples cannot be declined according to one strict political grammar that excludes all others. In this germination of peace, we need the wind of broad reconciliation to sow a seed in the furrows where scarred memories are laid to rest and the growth of our fields of convergence must be hastened.

We, Palestinians and Israelis, must take charge of our evolution from mutual recognition to knowledge and

acceptance of each other in validating our joint aspirations and in respecting our differences.

If official recognition has fundamental value for the future it is because it includes and creates a dynamic of peace that is vital in order to rise above the press of daily events haunted by an often murky past.

More immediately, in this prestigious forum of the United Nations, the dynamic and dialogue of peace must allow us, Palestinians and Israelis, to free ourselves from the doctrinaire shackles of preserving a mindless ritual: that of periodically pillorying Israel through the persistence of certain obsolete resolutions that refuse to disappear, pillorying by United Nations opprobrium based on a majority "follow the leader" attitude that rarely changes.

In our very region these days, irresponsible anti-Israeli accusations proffered in a gust of obscurantism from another age, shaped in the mould of rumours and medieval myths, attribute to Israel the deliberate poisoning of Palestinian babies and their mothers.

Given these distortions, the incredible paroxysm of accusation or the practice of laying perpetual diplomatic siege to Israel, the dynamic and dialogue of peace are both urgent and essential.

Since 1993 direct negotiation has brought Israelis and Palestinians together. It is creating agreements, compromises and successive political achievements that are unprecedented from the Palestinian viewpoint. Direct negotiations are also giving rise to Israeli-Palestinian proximity, people to people, in a broad range of inter-community activities that make up the canvas of our reconciliation and of our future.

Any attack, systematic or deliberate, on the nature of direct negotiations in substance or in form reduces the spirit of openness and of founding dialogue and strengthens the ill-considered practice of hard-line diplomacy against Israel under the emblem of the family of nations.

The Government of Ehud Barak, resolute in its vision and its strategy for peace, is determined to put an end to an age-old conflict and to reach an era of coexistence with shared development and prosperity. At the starting point of the permanent status negotiations, which will set our common destinies, including that of the Palestinian entity as it will emerge out of the negotiations, an overriding imperative becomes clear: the ethical and political commitment linking the partners to peace and binding them

to conduct and take responsibility for their dialogue and their actions with a vision of future generations, a vision as free as possible from the torments and vicissitudes of yesterday and nurtured, as far as possible, by the successes of today and the triumphs of tomorrow.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On this day in 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which altered the face of history in the Middle East and divided Palestine into two States under the British Mandate — one Arab and one Jewish — and also established the city of Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum*. Today, we remember with the world that in spite of the scores of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions that have ensued, the Palestinian people are still deprived of their natural rights to exercise self-determination and to establish their independent State on their own territory. The consideration by the General Assembly of the item entitled "Question of Palestine" on this day every year reminds us all of the historical responsibility of the United Nations towards this question — a responsibility that will not be fulfilled until a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to this issue, in all its aspects, is reached.

The international community realizes now more than ever before that the question of Palestine constitutes the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that without reaching a just and comprehensive solution to this question, the Middle East, with its strategic importance to the world, will remain a region plagued by instability and tension. It is important for Israel to recognize this fact as well, so that no one will be under the illusory impression that postponing the resolution of some aspects of the question of Palestine would create an atmosphere conducive to the establishment of long-term peace or that temporary and short-term solutions or partial agreements could be a substitute for the comprehensive settlement of the question in all its aspects.

After several long decades of conflict, both the Palestinian and Israeli sides chose peace as the path to reaching a solution. This has led to the initiation of the peace process in Madrid in 1991 and to the agreements reached afterwards, from the Declaration of Principles in 1993 to the Memorandum signed at Sharm el-Sheikh last September.

Egypt has always been keen to encourage both the Palestinian and the Israeli parties to achieve progress on

the Palestinian track. In this context, Egypt welcomed the implementation by Israel of the commitments it undertook in the Wye River Memorandum concerning the release of a number of Palestinian prisoners and the opening of the southern safe passage route between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. We hope that the other commitments of the interim period will soon be implemented. At the forefront of those commitments are the conclusion of the second phase and the implementation of the third phase, the redeployment by Israel of its forces in the West Bank, the release of the remaining Palestinian prisoners, the opening of the northern safe passage route and the inauguration of the Gaza sea port and the completion of all its facilities. The implementation of the remaining commitments will undoubtedly serve as the proper ground for the conduct of the final status negotiations in an atmosphere of restored confidence and stability.

There is no doubt that those who follow the peace process in general, and the events in the occupied Palestinian territory in particular, feel increasingly concerned and alarmed by the trend in Israeli settlement activities. It is both distressing and disturbing to find that the Israeli Government that took office last July has failed to follow a clear and decisive approach in putting an end to settlement activities, at least as a gesture of goodwill in its negotiations with the Palestinian side. On the contrary, we find continued support, both in word and deed, for the illegal and illegitimate position of the settlers in the occupied Palestinian territory, who are there in blatant violation of all relevant United Nations resolutions and of Israel's duties and commitments as an occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention. That Convention prohibits the occupying Power, *inter alia*, from transferring its civilian population to the territory it occupies.

It is regrettable that this support cannot be viewed as anything but a blatant attempt to consolidate the status quo as a fait accompli, thereby removing all substance and meaning from the upcoming, decisive negotiations. In the most optimistic of interpretations, such support can only be viewed as an obvious attempt to improve the negotiating cards held by Israel with the aim of using them during the final status negotiations. In any case, Egypt believes that the continuation of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory can only have a destructive impact on the peace process as a whole. It will be almost impossible to talk about establishing real peace in the Middle East under such conditions.

East Jerusalem is occupied territory. This is an established fact under international legitimacy, and it has

been declared as such by all relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), the resolutions of the General Assembly and the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Egypt follows with the greatest concern the illegal Israeli measures aimed at altering the status of Jerusalem, in particular those measures that support and condone expansionist settlement activities in East Jerusalem and its vicinity and that are feverishly aimed at consolidating the illegal annexation of the city by Israel. Egypt will continue to reaffirm the Palestinian right to occupied East Jerusalem notwithstanding our acknowledgement that the issue of Jerusalem is part of the final status negotiations.

The question of Palestinian refugees, the oldest extant refugee question in the world, is also among the issues that will be dealt with in the final status negotiations. For the first time in 50 years, this question, which has weighed so heavily on the conscience of the international community since 1948, is close to a possible solution. The solution I am referring to here is one based on justice, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and subsequent resolutions providing for the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and to receive compensation if they choose not to do so. Egypt warns of the consequences of ignoring the resolutions of international legitimacy on this grave humanitarian issue.

Egypt is working seriously and diligently towards the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine. That settlement is the key to the establishment of peace in the Middle East. Without it, the region will remain on the brink of instability and tension. We hope that Israel will demonstrate not only similar seriousness in working to achieve peace in the region, but also the ability to negotiate in good faith by enhancing mutual confidence with the Palestinian side on the basis of equality and not of occupying land by force or imposing a fait accompli. Finally, we hope that Israel would also be able to take decisions that would help achieve a just peace and restore to the Palestinian people their inalienable rights after all the sufferings they have endured — sufferings that we all hope will soon come to an end.

Egypt is deeply convinced that the year 2000 will witness before we enter into the third millennium the establishment of the independent Palestinian state for which the Palestinian people have struggled for so long.

That state will be active and peace-loving; will maintain relations of good-neighbourliness and cooperation with all its neighbours; will constitute a significant, positive and long-awaited addition to our region; and will contribute maturely to, and play an important role in, shaping our region's new future. That future will be based on cooperation for development, and prosperity, and will enable this region, home to the three monotheistic religions, to play again an active role in the international arena politically, economically and socially.

Mr. Mesdoui (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): The United Nations commemorated this morning the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, at which all speakers, whether representatives of organizations or major political bodies, recognized the need for the international community to continue to be involved in this issue in order to reach a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement.

More than half a century after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which expressly recognized the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state on its national territory, like all other peoples in the world, the Palestinians are still the victims of injustice, living in conditions of occupation, oppression and humiliation while important political developments have taken place in the world resulting in the elimination of colonization and in a recognition of the right of peoples to self-determination.

The situation in the Middle East in general, and in Palestine in particular, gives rise to concern due to the slow pace of the peace process in the region. After years of standstill under the rightist Government in Israel, which led to an effective freezing of the peace process and the end of any attempt to make it advance, it is logical to have some hope after the Labor Government has assumed power in Israel.

The situation slowly began to become more normal, though there were difficulties. What we are currently asking of the Israeli Government is that it respect the letter and spirit of the agreements concluded and the commitments made with the Palestinian Authority, including the Wye River Memorandum.

Algeria reaffirms its unreserved and unconditional support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to recover their usurped rights and their right to live in peace and security in their land, under the flag of their independent state.

Algeria continues to support the peace process in the Middle East and is convinced that this is the best way to settle this complex problem, which has been the source of many tragedies, wars and destruction, with a view to realizing the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to ending occupation in all its forms and manifestations, in accordance with international legality and internationally binding resolutions.

Algeria believes that the sole way for settling the problem in the Middle East and the core question of Palestine lies in the recognition of the national and legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, primarily their right to an independent state on their land, with the Holy City of Jerusalem as its capital.

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has often said that Algeria will fully support any sincere initiative to settle the Middle East question and the problem of Palestine in a just, lasting and comprehensive way. Algeria gives its full support to any initiative aimed at achieving that objective.

However, Algeria is not prepared to support efforts that are not serious and whose aim is to find a pretext to delay and manipulate matters, or any effort not aimed at attaining this objective. The just question of Palestine has the full and absolute support of all African countries. The 35th African Summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity, held in Algiers last July, was yet another occasion for African leaders to reaffirm their total support for the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people to regain their national inalienable rights. During that summit, Chairman Arafat enjoyed a warm fraternal welcome from all the heads of State or Government who participated in this summit.

This shows support for the struggle of the Palestinian people. That principled approach is traditional for Africans, who support the struggle of all peoples for self-determination on the basis of their own experience of long and bitter struggle against occupation, colonization, foreign hegemony and racial discrimination. The African leaders reaffirm the right of the Palestinian people, under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), to exercise their national and inalienable rights, including the right to return to their country and recover their land and the right to self-determination and to the creation of an independent State on their national soil with East Jerusalem as its capital, in conformity with United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy.

The celebration at the United Nations of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is of great importance to the international community. It proves once more the commitment and persistence of the international community in supporting the just struggle of the Palestinian people and in providing such support until it achieves its objective: the declaration of an independent Palestinian State.

Important developments took place last year, as demonstrated by the adoption by the General Assembly of a resolution aimed at raising the status of the Palestinian delegation, which was an important step in the recognition by the United Nations and other countries of the world of the equality of representation of Palestine with other countries. Furthermore, the holding in July of the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention provided an opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its support for this unarmed Arab people, who have been faced with repeated provocative and aggressive attacks, campaigns of displacement, land appropriation and the continuing and illegal colonization of its territory by the occupying Israeli forces. The Palestinian people have placed all their hopes in the international community for the protection and recognition of their legitimate rights. Today, they ask the international community to play a more effective role in the future so that internationally binding resolutions can be implemented.

As we approach the third millennium, we call on the United Nations to play more than ever before its role as the international Organization responsible for maintaining international peace and security in the most effective way possible.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Once again, the General Assembly is taking up the question of Palestine, as it has done in previous years. Since the convening of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, certain developments have taken place with regard to this central issue, among which we would like to highlight the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999 by the Israeli and Palestinian sides. That Memorandum deals specifically with the question of the timetable for the implementation of the commitments provided for by the agreements concluded and with the resumption of final status negotiations. Furthermore, last September, the two sides initiated those negotiations.

However, despite such developments, as indicated in the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the

Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the situation on the ground is still worrying because of the continued policy pursued by the occupying Israeli authorities of creating new facts on the ground.

Furthermore, last year, illegal Israeli actions continued in occupied Jerusalem and in the remaining occupied Palestinian territories, especially the establishment and expansion of settlements. That prompted the General Assembly to recommend the convening of a Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. That Conference, which, as the Assembly knows, was convened in Geneva on 15 July 1999, issued a statement that affirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

With the dawning of the new millennium and the new prospects that it carries, the reality of the situation in the Palestinian territories and in the Middle East region in general, which has remained the same for several decades, requires that the international community intensify and accelerate its efforts to exploit the opportunity that is available now to help establish the desired peace in the Middle East — a comprehensive, just and durable peace which will guarantee for the Palestinian people the achievement of their inalienable, legitimate national rights, foremost among which is the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State on their territory, with its capital in Al-Quds al-Sharif. Such a peace would also guarantee the end of Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights and southern Lebanon and enable all peoples and nations in the region to live in peace and security and to devote themselves to building a better future.

The attention of the international community, as represented by the General Assembly, is once again focused on Israel. Establishing peace in the Middle East requires Israel to respect the commitments it has undertaken in the context of agreements concluded with the Palestinian side, which has fulfilled all its obligations. It also requires Israel to abide by the principles that have formed the basis of the Middle East peace process and to respect international legitimacy and relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Israel must also respect the timetable agreed upon with the Palestinian side in the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum as it relates to the final status negotiations. Israel is also called upon to return to the negotiating table in the context of the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and to

withdraw from the Syrian Golan and from southern Lebanon in accordance with the requirements of the relevant United Nations resolutions.

In a letter addressed to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia, stated:

"Proceeding from its firm position of principle in support of the question of Palestine and its effective stand at the side of the Palestinian people, Tunisia once again calls on the international community to intensify its efforts and move quickly in order to secure favourable conditions and make available the means of making progress in and achieving success for the Middle East peace process so as to guarantee respect by Israel of its international commitments and adherence to the framework that has formed the basis of the peace process since its inception, especially the principle of land for peace, commitment to international legitimacy and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and relevant General Assembly resolutions."

The international community, foremost among which is the United Nations, will remain responsible for the question of Palestine until a satisfactory settlement has been achieved based on United Nations and internationally binding resolutions, ensuring the full realization by the Palestinian people of their legitimate rights, including the establishment of a Palestinian State and a just resolution of the refugee question, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

In this critical phase of the Palestinian question — the beginning of permanent-status negotiations by the two sides — the role of the United Nations has become more important. In that connection, Tunisia notes with satisfaction the recent appointment by Mr. Kofi Annan of a Special Representative to the Multilateral Negotiations on the Middle East Peace Talks and Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories. Moreover, the sponsors of the peace process must spare no effort to move the process forward and to protect it from any stumbling blocks or other dangers until peace is achieved in the region.

The success of the peace process is linked also to efforts by all other international parties able in one way or

another to play a role in promoting the process. In that connection, we note the effective role played by assistance to the Palestinian people in laying the basis for a sound Palestinian economy and society, which will be the nucleus of stability for the anticipated Palestinian State. We appeal to international donors to increase their assistance to the Palestinian Authority in all spheres; such assistance undoubtedly constitutes major support for the peace endeavours.

We wish also to stress how important it is that international support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) be intensified to enable it to continue its role pending the achievement of a comprehensive solution to the refugee problem in conformity with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

In conclusion, I wish to commend the noble work carried out by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People under the active and judicious chairmanship of Ambassador Ibra Duguène Ka, in promoting the genuine realization by the Palestinian people of its rights. That work should continue until there is a final solution to the question of Palestine.

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The new millennium is dawning. At this juncture, when the world is drawing up plans for the new era, we are all the more concerned over the future and the destiny of the Palestinian people, who have long been deprived of a home. But we are heartened to see that, thanks to concerted efforts by various relevant parties in the international community, major progress has been made in the Middle East peace process. The Palestinian people now finally have a self-rule government on their own territory, and are thus one important step closer towards regaining their legitimate national rights and establishing an independent State of Palestine.

Last September, Palestine and Israel reached an understanding on the implementation of the Wye River accord and on negotiations on the final status of Palestine, and signed the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, thus removing the obstacles in the way of implementing the Wye River accord. Resuming the permanent-status talks and the opening of safe passages in the Palestinian autonomous area are yet another achievement by Palestine and by Israel after serious negotiations. We welcome such development and hope that the parties concerned will continue this flexible and pragmatic

attitude, implement earnestly their various agreements and understandings, overcome the various distractions and advance the peace process on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace so as to bring about an early and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli disputes, including the question of Palestine.

For reasons known to all, even after gaining self-rule, the Palestinian autonomous area is still facing tremendous difficulties in developing its economy, and the livelihood of the Palestinian people is in great need of improvement. We consider that helping the autonomous area in pursuing economic development will enable the Palestinian people quickly to enjoy the benefits of peace and will thus boost their faith in the peace talks. The international community is duty-bound to provide whatever support and assistance it can to the Palestinian people. Developed countries in particular should shoulder greater responsibility in this connection.

As the largest and most authoritative intergovernmental international organization on the world stage today, the United Nations should play a more active and effective role in resolving regional conflicts and safeguarding world peace. We highly appreciate the efforts and contributions of the United Nations in promoting over the years a settlement of the Middle East issue, with the question of Palestine at its core. We support and hope to see an even greater United Nations role in promoting the Middle East peace process and a final settlement of the question of Palestine and other issues in the Middle East.

The Chinese Government and the Chinese people have always devoted great attention to the question of Palestine. For decades, we have lent staunch support to the just cause of the Palestinian people, provided assistance to the Palestinian people to the best of our capacity through multilateral and bilateral channels. We have made untiring efforts and contributions in advancing the Middle East peace process. We are of the view that the question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East question. Only when the question of Palestine is resolved and all the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to an independent State, are restored can the Middle East enjoy real and lasting peace. The Chinese Government will, as always, work with the international community to continue to strive for a just and reasonable settlement of the question of Palestine.

Ms. Al-Nadari (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): The question of Palestine has been one of the most important

items on the agenda of the General Assembly since its twenty-ninth session, held in 1974. At that historic session, the Assembly invited the Palestine Liberation Organization, the representative of the Palestinian people, to participate in its deliberations on the question of Palestine in plenary meeting. Also at that session, the General Assembly once again reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and stressed that the achievement of those rights was indispensable for the resolution of the question of Palestine.

A quarter of a century later, the question of Palestine continues to be one of the major issues awaiting a just, lasting, comprehensive and final solution so that peace can prevail in the Middle East. The achievement of such a peace has become an international and regional humanitarian demand so that a new page can be turned in the lives and relationships of the peoples of the region, closing the chapter of past tragedies and abandoning past hatreds. It would provide fresh and vast opportunities for tolerance among various cultures, religions and ethnicities.

In this regard, my delegation expresses its satisfaction at the General Assembly's adoption by consensus a few days ago of the resolution on Bethlehem 2000. My delegation believes that the success of the millennium celebrations will constitute a new turning point on the road to the achievement of peace and tolerance and a further step towards a future in which the peoples of the Middle East region will enjoy peace, security and stability.

When the peace process started, it was welcomed by the peoples of the region. There were some successes on the Palestinian-Israeli track in the agreements signed by the two parties, the latest of which was the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum of 4 September 1999. This Memorandum is a good step towards revitalizing the peace process and ensuring its continuity. It is our hope that this peace process will proceed without further hinderance so that the Palestinian people can restore their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State on their national soil with Al-Quds al-Sharif (Jerusalem) as its capital.

In this regard, it must be reaffirmed that any just and comprehensive settlement on the Palestinian track must take into account the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and their lands in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The release of

Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons must also be taken into account.

Israeli practices against the Palestinian people in the occupied territories are a cause of major concern. The illegal construction of settlements, expansion of existing ones, the demolition of homes, expropriation of land and the alternation of the demographic character of the territories and in particular of Al Quds al-Sharif, the campaigns of detention, torture and collective punishment — all these constitute a huge obstacle in the path of the peace process. The international community yearns to see its desired objectives achieved soon.

Israel must realize that the establishment of an independent Palestinian State will be a major factor in the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. In this regard, we call upon the Israeli Government to continue to implement the agreements and commitments made in the peace negotiations since the convening of the Peace Conference in Madrid, which reiterated the principle of land for peace. The Arab States that signed peace treaties with Israel have demonstrated the absolute wish of

the Arabs to establish peace in the region and that they consider peace an irreversible strategic choice. They continue to fulfil their commitments under these treaties with a view to the establishment of a developed, safe, peaceful and secure Middle East.

The Republic of Yemen has supported the efforts for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. My country reaffirms its principled position that just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East must be based, first and foremost, on the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, particularly their right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State with Al-Quds as its capital. It also must be based on the withdrawal of Israel from southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan. We look forward to the day when the flags of peace will fly over the Middle East so that the States of the region can live in peace and security.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.



General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

66th plenary meeting

Tuesday, 30 November 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 44 (continued)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/54/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/457)

Draft resolutions (A/54/L.42, A/54/L.43, A/54/L.44, A/54/L.45)

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a pleasure to thank Ambassador Itira Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his report and for his tireless efforts, along with the members of the Committee, in informing the international community about the question of Palestine and the challenges that have been posed by successive Israeli Governments.

Although half a century has elapsed since the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) in 1947 — which partitioned Palestine into two independent States, one Arab and one Jewish — and despite the fact that for many

decades the United Nations has shown keen interest in dealing with the various Israeli policies that have prevented the establishment of a Palestinian State, and despite all the international efforts, we now regrettably face yet another challenge, due to the refusal of the Israeli Government to implement the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy.

Beginning with the Madrid Peace Conference, the United Arab Emirates has with keen interest followed the peace process, including the series of successive agreements that have been concluded between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, the latest being the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum of last September. The United Arab Emirates considers that all the measures that have been taken to date by successive Israeli Governments in the context of the commitments Israel entered into under these agreements do not meet the bare minimum requirements for the improvement of the social, economic, political and security situation of the Palestinian people, nor do they meet the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations to establish a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, and to resolve their situation in general.

In spite of the present Israeli Government's professed good intentions, and in spite of the preliminary steps it has made during the last few months to meet some of its commitments, we believe that these measures are completely inadequate. They are characterized by selectivity and by a lack of serious commitment to meet



Israel's moral, political and legal obligations. How else can the international community view the continuation of international Israeli policies of building illegal settlements and expanding the present ones and confiscating more territory and property and natural resources — such as water resources in Palestinian territories and in the occupied Arab territories, including the Holy City of Al-Quds al-Sharif. These policies are being carried out in a manner that completely contradicts the letter and spirit of the peace process.

We would like to express our disappointment regarding evidence provided by certain official international statistics to the effect that since 1967 the Israeli Government has confiscated no less than 75 per cent of the Palestinian territory in Al-Quds al-Sharif. It has established approximately 40,000 settler units and has destroyed more than 2,500 Arab homes.

It has confiscated the identification cards of hundreds of native Palestinian inhabitants of the city in an attempt to deprive them of their right of residence there. We are also deeply concerned by the decision made last July by the Israeli Ministry of Housing and Construction to add 2,594 settlement units near Al-Quds. It is also pursuing its policy of establishing the largest, most dangerous and illegal Jewish settlements in Jebel Abu Ghneim and in Ras al-Amud. It has also stepped up its efforts to build bypass roads that encircle the Arab quarters of the city in an attempt to impose its civil administration there. It does all this for the sole purpose of expanding and changing the religious, historic, legal, demographic and cultural characteristics of this holy Arab city and in order to impose a fait accompli that will affect the final settlement of the other aspects of the Palestinian question.

These unjustified and dangerous Israeli policies in the sacred Arab city of Al-Quds, in addition to other aggressive measures — such as the closure of cities and villages, the imposition of measures to curtail Palestinian freedom of movement and economic expansion, and the refusal to release the remaining detainees and prisoners — are all aimed at delaying the implementation of the measures of the second and third phases of redeployment of forces and withdrawal from the occupied territories. In addition, these policies impose extremely difficult conditions for the Palestinians, affecting a range of activities from operating the seaport in Gaza to opening the safe passage in the North between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. All these measures and policies are null, void and in flagrant violation of Israel's commitments in the context of the peace process, based on resolutions of

international legitimacy, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the principle of land for peace.

All these difficult challenges, imposed by Israeli intransigence, to the efforts to find a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine lead us to renew our assertion that the United Nations and its specialized agencies still form the natural basis of international legitimacy for handling this question. The United Nations should compel Israel to implement all its commitments in strict compliance with its relevant resolutions. In this respect, while we commend the positive role played by the United States in addressing all the obstacles to the peace process and thank it for its continuous support, we hope that the peace sponsors and the European Union will redouble their efforts to enable the establishment of a just and lasting peace that will allow the Palestinian people to recover their legitimate rights to self-determination and the establishment of their own independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

While the Emirates welcome all international and regional efforts to revive the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, we also reiterate our full support for the positions of the Governments of Syria and Lebanon calling for the resumption of the negotiations at the point where they left off, without preconditions and in a manner that would ensure complete and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Arab Golan Heights to the lines of 4 June 1967 and from southern Lebanon and the Beka'a Valley, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and with the principle of land for peace.

Finally, while we believe that a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East requires an equitable and balanced treatment of the various aspects of the question of Palestine relating to the settlements, Al-Quds, the refugees, security, borders and water resources, which are to be addressed in the final status negotiations, we call upon the Israeli Government to commit itself to the principles governing the solution to these problems in a manner commensurate with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy stipulating the right of all Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and designating Al-Quds as an integral part of Arab and Palestinian occupied territories. Israel must withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967, including Al-Quds and the Syrian Golan Heights. We also reaffirm that the security measures required by the Israeli Government should be reciprocal, entailing above all complete respect

for the security and stability of the Palestinian people and neighbouring States and the elimination of all forms of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, so that the people of the region may live in peace, security, stability and prosperity.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*):

The question of Palestine, which has been on the General Assembly's agenda for decades, has brought us together again today. As always, Cuba reiterates its total rejection of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and raises its voice to call for an end of abuses and for the absolute respect of all the rights of the Palestinian people.

Cuba shares the desire of the international community to find a solution to the problems that affect stability in the Middle East. This must include a lasting solution to the Palestinian problem, which is undoubtedly its core. It is unthinkable that we can manage to strengthen the peace process while the Palestinian people are unable effectively and fully to enjoy their fundamental rights.

All of the resolutions of the General Assembly on the Palestinian question remain relevant. The Security Council itself, through 25 resolutions adopted over the years, has confirmed its recognition of the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories, including Jerusalem. On 15 July, in response to recommendations made in the various resolutions adopted at the tenth emergency session of the General Assembly, for the first time in the history of the Geneva Conventions a conference of the High Contracting Parties was convened to consider the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories. The conference not only reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention, but also reiterated the need for its provisions to be respected in the Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation.

The beginning of this decade was marked by hopeful steps for the peace process in the Middle East. The Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 and the signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993 were historic moments and significant contributions to the effort to obtain a lasting peace. More recently, the Wye River Memorandum reawakened the hopes of the international community and, for a moment, it seemed that the solution to the Palestinian problem and peace in the region were about to become realities.

However, we have witnessed the numerous obstacles that have been placed on the road to peace: the building of new settlements in the occupied territories, the violation of the international status of Jerusalem, the flagrant human rights violations of the Palestinian people, the unilateral suspension of the Wye River agreements. These have confirmed the opposition of Israeli authorities to progress in the peace process in the Middle East.

The signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999 by President Yassir Arafat and Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Barak has once again revived hopes and a cautious optimism, as well as the possibility of advancing towards a just and lasting peace which will put an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories. The results remain to be seen, and despite the fact that there have been positive signs, the international community is dismayed to see that violation of the international rights and human rights of the Palestinian people and the illegal settlements in occupied territories have continued.

Cuba reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to have an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital and rejects the measures designed to change the legal status and the demographic composition of that city. We demand the return of all Palestinian territories occupied by Israel. Cuba advocates respect for human rights and the application of the principles of international humanitarian law to the Palestinian people. The Palestinian people today are experiencing a crucial step in their torturous path towards the fulfilment of all their legitimate rights.

Today more than ever our Palestinian brothers require the support of all peoples of the world. Today more than ever the voice and action of the international community must avoid any manoeuvring by the enemies of peace, who want to continue to foster a climate of hate and ignorance in the region. Today more than ever the Palestinian people require the support of the General Assembly and of the United Nations.

Cuba hopes that peace will emerge in the Middle East, an unconditional, just and genuine peace. Convinced that that moment will arrive, we wish to reiterate the firm commitment of the Cuban people and Government to the noble and just cause of the Palestinian people and their full support for the exercise of their legitimate and inalienable rights.

Mr. Sharma (India): Yesterday we celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This provided the international community yet another opportunity to demonstrate its support for the realization of the cherished goals and aspirations of the people of Palestine. The Government and people of India once again reaffirm their solidarity with the people of Palestine, who have striven valiantly over the past decades for the restoration of their legitimate rights. India's bond of friendship with the Palestinian people is firm and unshakeable and is based on a rich and varied interaction over the ages.

This year we observe this solemn occasion with hope in our hearts. The last year of the millennium has witnessed developments which could lead to a fair and just settlement of the Palestinian question. India welcomes the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in September 1999 and is happy to note that many provisions of this Memorandum have been implemented, including opening of the southern safe passage route connecting the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and the release of Palestinian political prisoners. Unilateral steps should be eschewed, and all provisions of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum should be faithfully implemented. An atmosphere of mutual trust is necessary for the timely completion of permanent status negotiations to realize a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. We are aware that the road to peace, while paved with good intentions, is tortuous and strewn with impediments. Often the last steps are the most difficult.

India has consistently stood for a peaceful solution to all disputes. We have been closely following developments concerning the Middle East peace process and remain vitally interested in the ushering in of peace, development and stability in the region. The courageous initial steps by visionaries, united in their aim to put an end to decades of conflict, need to be boldly carried forward in the quest for lasting peace and friendship. We salute the courage and the spirit of accommodation and optimism shown by the parties which has resulted in an outline for a just solution to the Palestinian question.

Political support for the peace process needs to be reinforced by support for the multifaceted tasks of nation-building. The efforts of the Palestinian Authority, particularly in the fields of health, education and the creation of employment, need to be encouraged and

assisted. Infrastructural development is a primary area of focus. The challenge posed by the pressing requirements of financial and technological support merits the urgent attention of the international community.

India stands ready, as in the past, to extend material and technical assistance in a spirit of solidarity to the Palestinian people in their important task of nation-building. A Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Cooperation between the Government of India and the Palestinian Authority was signed during the visit of President Yassir Arafat to India in November 1997. We seek to assist the Palestinian people through scholarships and exchange programmes. India pledged \$1 million as assistance to the Palestinian people at the first Washington donors conference in October 1995. Subsequently India pledged further sums of \$1 million each at donor conferences held in Paris in January 1996 and in Washington in November 1998. These pledges are being utilized for the provision of goods, for undertaking projects in the territory of the Palestinian National Authority and for human resource development. From the amount pledged in 1998 a sum of \$300,000 has been disbursed to the Al-Azhar University in Gaza for the expansion of its library. Since 1996 we have offered more than 148 specialized training slots at an estimated cost of Rs. 13.1 million. During the current financial year, 1999-2000, 30 training slots have been utilized. Moreover, India has been a regular contributor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

We recognize that it is incumbent on all of us to work together to help move the peace process in West Asia. However, ultimately it is the parties themselves that have to shoulder the major responsibility for achieving a permanent and lasting solution. The spirit of accommodation and the political will displayed in jump-starting the stalled negotiations recently reflect the desire of the people in the region to arrive at a just and comprehensive peace. Let us not be found wanting in the crucial days ahead.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso)(spoke in French): Yesterday morning in the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People we celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Today, in the debate on the question of Palestine, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), through me, wishes to reiterate its support for the Palestinian people, who, under the aegis of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its Chairman,

Mr. Yassir Arafat, are fighting vigorously to regain their legitimate rights.

General Assembly resolution 52/52, which is based on the principle of land for peace and is one of the cornerstones for the settlement of the Palestinian question, has obviously not yet been fully implemented. Nor have Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), key components in any solution to the situation in the Middle East.

Moreover, the peace process begun in Madrid, coming directly out of the Oslo accords, has, as we know, been frozen following the procrastination — not to say reversals — by the Israeli side. Nevertheless, the international community is relieved to note that despite the many obstructions, misunderstandings and distrust that have characterized the relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, both parties are clearly taking the path to peace. Indeed, the signing of the Wye River accord by the Israeli Government and the Palestine Liberation Organization was an important and very encouraging step that opened up the way to final status negotiations. Also, the signing by the two parties of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum is certainly a further step in the right direction.

All of these initiatives are a basis for a comprehensive and just settlement to the Palestinian question, provided that this favourable wind continues to blow all the goodwill in the direction of a clearer understanding of the supreme benefits of a definitive understanding between the protagonists. In clear terms, as the report of the Secretary-General on this question recalls, all the parties are called on

“to implement in full their commitments under existing agreements and to refrain from actions that pre-empt the negotiations and worsen both the political and the economic situation in the Palestinian territories, and to abide scrupulously by their obligations under international law”.
(A/54/457, para.3)

As regards these obligations, Israel must put an end to all of the depredations inflicted on the Palestinian people, in particular by returning lands improperly confiscated, halting the aggressive settlement of occupied territories and putting an end to the various forms of violence against the Palestinian populations. It goes without saying that the rights of the Palestinian people to have and

to live in a sovereign and independent Palestinian State are inalienable and non-negotiable.

However, it is essential that the international community accompany both parties in their efforts to put an end to half a century of conflict. Thus, we cannot but welcome the Secretary-General's decision to appoint a Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. We are sure that this involvement on the ground will be a source of strength for the just solution to this question.

The obligations of the international community also involve economic, financial and technical assistance to help the Palestinian people emerge from the underdevelopment to which they have been consigned by these 50 years of deadlock and conflict.

In this momentum towards peace, we would like once again to congratulate warmly the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka. Their actions are in perfect keeping with the strategy for a just solution to the Palestinian question. We also welcome the propitious initiative of Bethlehem 2000, the realization of which is soon to come about.

Recalling the birth of Christ in the land of Islam, as proposed by the Palestinian Authority, means transcending the prejudices that frequently underlie human misunderstandings. This is a display of great maturity and recognizes, above all, that love, fraternity and tolerance are transcendent values that can bring people together — even those who are divided by insurmountable antagonisms.

May these virtues continue to inspire all people of goodwill, and in particular, the Palestinians and Israelis, so that in this land of the Middle East, the cradle of a very prestigious civilization and the point of confluence of the revealed religions, the flame of peace will be lit again for ever.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Yesterday the United Nations observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is fitting that yesterday and today the General Assembly is considering agenda items 44 and 43, respectively, on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. With your permission, Mr. President, we will combine our comments on those two items into the present statement.

We would like to thank the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, for his very able leadership of the Committee and for the presentation of the comprehensive report contained in document A/54/35.

For the last half century, the question of Palestine has been discussed in this Assembly, and the international community has been repeatedly calling upon all parties concerned to make every effort for the promotion of peace in the region and has asked Israel to halt its illegal activities and end its occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories.

Foreign occupation in itself constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights. Prolonged occupation only worsens the process of reconciliation. Israeli occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories represents an utter violation of and persistent disregard for international law. In continuing its agenda of suppressing resistance to occupation, Israel applies tactics that generate various forms of human rights violations.

Bangladesh firmly believes that for a lasting peace in the Middle East the question of Palestine needs to be addressed seriously. Nothing short of a peaceful settlement of the Palestine question would help in the resolution of the continuing crisis in the region. The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people have to be recognized and realized. Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and occupied Arab territories, including the Golan, is essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process.

In a message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, yesterday, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, said,

"The observance of the Day in the last year of this century will bear special meaning only if the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are established in a sovereign Palestinian State and a comprehensive and durable peace is achieved in the Middle East before the next Day of Solidarity, in the new millennium".

Israeli settlement in the occupied territories has always been a source of tension. The tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly was resumed twice to address this and other violations of international law by Israel. Resolutions were adopted by an overwhelming majority. We are disappointed that out of 194 Israeli

settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, as many as 67 settlements had been expanded or built since the signing of the Oslo accords. It is regrettable that instead of continuing the process of freezing settlement activities, Israel authorized the building of new settlements, including the one in Jebel Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. The completion of this settlement will eventually have a significant effect on the demography of East Jerusalem. We are disturbed to learn that the Israeli authorities recently invited tenders for the actual construction of the housing units there.

The Israeli decision with regard to the expansion of the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem was discussed in the Security Council in June 1998. The international community urged Israel to refrain from implementation of its decision because such a plan would create a further imbalance in the population structure in the city in violation of the moratorium imposed by the Council. We are concerned at the Israeli decision to earmark its settlement activities as a national priority. This is another deliberate provocation to the feeling of the people of the occupied territories.

Palestinian political prisoners who remain in Israeli jails also continue to be subjected to torture and other forms of ill treatment and human rights violations. Such actions are in no way favourable to the Middle East peace process. Similarly, confiscation of land and restricting access to water resources and demolishing houses in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the Golan, will in no way bring about the desired peace in the region. The indiscriminate destruction of lives and property in southern Lebanon has become a routine affair.

Bangladesh expresses its utter condemnation of the Israeli policy of systematic violation of basic human rights in the occupied territories. We express our total solidarity with our Palestinian and Arab brothers in this regard. We would like to reiterate here that, under the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the occupying Power is obliged to guarantee the basic human rights of the people under its occupation. The Security Council, in 25 resolutions, adopted over years, has reconfirmed its recognition of applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the territories, including Jerusalem, occupied since 1967. Hence, there is no scope for unilateral refusal.

We call upon Israel to terminate completely its occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories, including Jerusalem, without delay. This will constitute a significant step forward in the realization of peace in the region. Bangladesh considers the Wye River Memorandum of October 1998 and the signing in Cairo of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999 by Israel and Palestine as promising. The agreements are to be implemented in letter and spirit to facilitate the peace process. Bangladesh strongly favours the idea that the fate of Jerusalem must be an element in the Palestinian-Israeli talks on the final status of the Palestinian territories. We would like to underscore the need for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process, as well as other subsequent agreements reached among the parties aimed at a resolution of the problem. We also reaffirm our conviction that the Palestine issue is the core of the Middle East problem.

In conclusion, Bangladesh reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine and the other Arab territories under Israeli occupation until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is achieved. We believe that the active involvement of the United Nations and the international community is essential for a successful outcome of the peace efforts.

Let me conclude by affirming that Bangladesh has joined in sponsoring the draft resolutions submitted to the General Assembly for decision under agenda items 43 and 44.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Last year, at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, like the majority of Member States, we expressed our concern over the grave deterioration of the peace process in the Middle East. At present we are particularly pleased to see that, thanks to the concerted efforts made by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, as well as the consistent support of the international community, the peace process has been reignited with the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999. We very much welcome this development and express the hope that the parties concerned will seriously carry out their commitments, continue to adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach, implement the existing agreements in earnest and push the peace process forward on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. We sincerely believe that such an approach

constitutes the only realistic way that would lead to a just solution of the problem of Palestine.

The question of Palestine is of course, one of the thorniest issues of our time. However, we believe that this problem, like many other thorny problems the world faces, can be resolved, provided that the parties directly concerned have the necessary political will to resolve it. The Palestinian people have suffered far too long, and the international community must do everything possible to assist the two parties in resolving their problems. It is true that the road to peace is not an easy one, because numerous obstacles still remain. However, the cause of peace is just and represents the ardent hope of the peoples of the region to live together, to cooperate and to coexist peacefully. It is therefore incumbent upon us all to do whatever we possibly can to ensure that the peace process in the Middle East can move forward.

The question of Palestine is the core of the Middle East problem. Only when the Palestinian issue is resolved in a just and reasonable manner and all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are restored can Palestine and Israel enjoy real and lasting peace. In this context, my delegation wishes to reaffirm the Lao People's Democratic Republic's unwavering support for the Palestinian people, under the leadership of the PLO, in their struggle to exercise their inalienable rights, in particular the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State in their homeland. The international community is duty-bound to continue to work to assist the Palestinian people in the search for a just and durable solution to their problem.

On 14 May 1948, the State of Israel was created. We all welcomed that event. The international community today impatiently awaits the creation of an independent Palestinian State, a good and friendly neighbour of Israel, in accordance with the partition plan adopted by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947. It is in this spirit of optimism that my delegation sees the future of the Middle East region. Let us only wish all the best to the two parties directly concerned — Israel and the PLO — in their common and noble efforts to resolve their differences.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): Yesterday, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the President of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, conveyed, on behalf of the Government and people of Sri Lanka, warm felicitations and best wishes to President Arafat and the people of the

State of Palestine. The President of Sri Lanka noted in her message that Sri Lanka has always considered the question of Palestine to be at the core of the concerns of the Middle East region; that Sri Lanka has constantly and consistently supported the Palestinian people in their endeavours to realize their inalienable national rights; that Sri Lanka shares the satisfaction of the international community over the progress achieved despite the delays and the obstacles in the bilateral Palestine-Israel negotiations for peace; and that Sri Lanka believes in the creation of a new Palestinian State by September 2000. I have the honour today, on behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka, to convey the same sentiments and beliefs to the General Assembly as it considers the question of Palestine.

The question of Palestine has been on the agenda of the United Nations for the past 50 years. It has been one of the principal responsibilities of the United Nations to keep the quest of the Palestinian people for the realization of their inalienable national rights in the public eye. It is a responsibility that the General Assembly in particular has discharged conscientiously. The General Assembly has done so principally through its Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

To the Chairman of the Committee — the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka — to the Committee as a whole and to the offices of the Secretariat that work with the Committee — in particular, I believe, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information — much appreciation is due — should be conveyed; and I do so on behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka.

The Committee, in its report that is now before the General Assembly, speaks, among other matters, of the conditions in which the Palestinians of the occupied territories live — the problems which in fundamental ways affect Palestinian lands, Palestinian lives, Palestinian hopes and dreams, ways that are clearly contrary to the requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention, whose applicability has been declared by both the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The reports of the Committee over the years have informed the General Assembly of the difficult circumstances affecting the Palestinians. The reports of the Committee and the General Assembly's discussions of the reports may contribute, and possibly do contribute, to the evolution of a more enlightened and sensitive perspective among Israeli authorities responsible for or aware of the administration of the occupied territories — a more

enlightened and sensitive perspective that appears to have been present in the decision a few months ago by the Supreme Court of Israel to prohibit extreme coercive methods of interrogation, and in the decision a few weeks ago to ease the residency restrictions on Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

The reports of the Committee constitute, therefore, important channels through which anxieties relating to the daily lives of the Palestinians — concerns as to their economic and social and human circumstances — are voiced while the intricate complexities of the peace process gradually unfold.

There are passages in the report of the Committee now before the General Assembly, however, that point to actions on the part of the Israeli authorities that are considered to be disruptive of the peace process and of the trust on which the processes of peace must proceed: settlements, and the tensions surrounding settlements — activities inconsistent with the occupied status of East Jerusalem in the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Thus, the clouds of the ever-present tension, violence and fear continue to cast a shadow over and darken expectations.

Those in a position to do so have endeavoured tirelessly to move all concerned towards the ultimate goal of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. Following the May 1999 elections in Israel, there were signs of the presence of a more enlightened, more sensitive view: the resumption in August of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations; Israeli troop redeployment; release of Palestinian prisoners; the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum; and the commitment to conclude a framework agreement for, and a comprehensive agreement by September 2000, on all permanent status issues.

The delegation of Sri Lanka joins other delegations in the hope expressed earlier by so many who have come to this podium that, on the eve of the new millennium, the bilateral negotiations on which the two parties — Israel and Palestine — have embarked will be satisfactorily concluded and a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, long awaited by all the peoples of the region, will at last be achieved, resolving the many political, social and human difficulties that trouble the lives of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories.

Ms. Nicholls (Guyana): Guyana joins the international community in solidarity with the Palestinian

people in their continuing struggle for their inalienable rights, including the right to a settled homeland.

It is unacceptable that in this era of democratization, a population of over 3.6 million is still without a land of its own and condemned to live in refugees camps, often in subhuman conditions. Their uncertain situation can only breed discontent and despair, leading inevitably to conflict. Almost every day, one reads of incidents resulting from the tension that prevails in the relations between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. When will this tension cease and harmonious coexistence come? For with every step of progress made towards peace, it appears that two steps are taken backwards.

Notwithstanding such frustration, a long-sought solution can now be seen, albeit through a glass darkly, on the horizon. For while reports on developments in the Middle East are generally discouraging, there is an occasional glimmer of hope that leads to the belief that, like seemingly intractable problems elsewhere, the Palestinian problem can be resolved. Certainly, the overture to a new dialogue, although hesitant and tentative, can reveal new vistas for agreements based on principles enunciated over the years by the United Nations. Agreement will come only, however, if there is bold and strong leadership on both sides and if they are willing to grasp the opportunity of the moment. Equally important will be popular support for reason over irrationality to promote a new spirit of mutual tolerance and trust.

We remain convinced that the peace process can and will work if all the parties involved are prepared to negotiate seriously and in good faith. We welcome the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, as well as the signing of the 4 September 1999 Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on the Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements Signed and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations. We urge the vigilance of the United Nations, and in particular of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to ensure that these negotiations are conducted in good faith. We also welcome the initiatives by interested countries to maintain the momentum for peace by encouraging the parties to remain in meaningful dialogue.

In this context, we recognize the magnanimity of the many neighbouring and other friendly countries which, though facing their own economic difficulties, have valiantly supported the peace process, and in practical terms have assisted and accommodated the Palestinian

refugees by providing them with shelter, food and health care. We encourage those States to continue their solid support of the Palestinian people until their struggle has finally been won.

Special mention must also be made of the contribution made by United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which in May next year will mark its fiftieth year of existence. UNRWA's mandate includes the provision of health care and education and the meeting of other basic needs of the Palestinian peoples, and the Agency has fulfilled that mandate satisfactorily over the past five decades. The Refugee Working Group headed by Canada has also played a very significant role in helping to raise financial assistance for the Palestinian refugees in the Middle East.

We urge, as an essential dynamic to the peace process, an expansion of the bilateral cooperation which has taken place, albeit in small tentative steps, with the creation of the Palestinian Authority and new prospects for improved relations. Opportunities for joint Palestinian-Israeli development cooperation are significant in that they can help to pave the way for political cooperation. We wish to comment especially on the initiative taken by both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government to celebrate the millennium. Their coming together will serve to inspire the Governments and peoples of the region to heighten their determination to solve the Palestinian problem and in the process bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

As we know, as a result of the initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Peace Prize Laureates, the year 2000 will be the International Year for the Culture of Peace. The global campaign is expected to produce the signature by as many as 100 million persons worldwide of the Manifesto 2000 for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence. These signatures, which will be presented to the Secretary-General during the Millennium Assembly next year, will represent a peaceful call for an end to conflict everywhere, including the Middle East. We can only pray that this unprecedented appeal will not go unheard and that before too long, the just aspirations of the Palestinian people will be fully satisfied.

Mr. Islam (Pakistan): The General Assembly is considering the item on the "Question of Palestine" to express the international community's support for the struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable

right to self-determination. Though the issue has been debated in this forum for over 51 years, there remain many roadblocks in the way of a comprehensive and final settlement.

At the outset, I would like to pay tribute to His late Majesty King Hassan of Morocco and His late Majesty King Hussein of Jordan for their support to, and espousal of, the Palestinian cause.

Pakistan has steadfastly supported the just struggle for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. No lasting peace in the Middle East will be possible without a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. The realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory are essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process.

The significance of the Holy City of Al-Quds Al-Sharif for the international community in general and the Islamic Ummah in particular requires no elaboration. Al-Quds Al-Sharif remains central to any comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

We believe that Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) provide a viable and just framework for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

We have noted the recent developments in the Middle East peace process, particularly on the Palestine-Israeli track. Pakistan considers the signing on 4 September 1999 of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements Signed and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations between Israel and Palestine a positive development. The implementation of commitments concerning the opening of the passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the partial release of prisoners is a positive development. Progress needs to be made on the phased redeployment of Israeli troops from the West Bank. We hope that progress will also be achieved in future negotiations on the permanent status issues within the agreed time-frame of September 2000.

Despite the progress made in negotiations, Israel continues with its illegal settlement activities. We note with concern that the construction of new, and the expansion of existing, settlements continues to be carried out in disregard of the concerns expressed by the international community. A large number of Palestinian prisoners still

remain in Israeli jails, and they continue to receive harsh treatment by the Israeli authorities. Such actions can destabilize the positive environment created after the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. It is therefore incumbent upon the international community, particularly the guarantors of the peace process, to use their influence and good offices to ensure full Israeli compliance with the peace agreements. The faithful implementation of all agreements is essential to avert the reversion of the region to conflict and political turmoil.

We salute the people of Palestine for the strides they have made towards realizing their right to self-determination. We have full confidence in the Palestinian leadership and its statesmanship, far-sightedness and wisdom in promoting a peaceful solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our full political, moral, diplomatic and material support to our Palestinian brethren in their heroic struggle, particularly at this critical phase in their history.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): Yesterday the United Nations observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The commemoration of that important occasion serves as a reminder to the international community of its continuing responsibility towards the Palestinian people in their quest for just and lasting peace and security in their own homeland.

Such a reminder is of particular significance since, at the dawning of the new millennium, we again find ourselves in an encouraging situation with the conclusion of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999. This step represents a new hope after decades of suffering and dispossession for the Palestinian people and numerous peace attempts and failed initiatives.

While it is fitting to commend the parties for their courage and commitment, which resulted in the signing of the agreement, it remains necessary to be cautiously optimistic because of the complexity and sensitivity of the outstanding issues. The steps taken so far, such as the release of prisoners and further redeployment from the West Bank in implementation of the Memorandum, are welcome. However, the continuation of the settlement activities by Israel remains a formidable obstacle that could derail the peace process. It is thus imperative for the international community to sustain its efforts to promote the cause of peace until a comprehensive, just

and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and peace and stability in the entire region are secured.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People remains at the forefront in campaigning for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, which is essential for international peace and security. We commend the courageous and important initiatives of the Committee, and in particular, its Chairman, my brother and colleague, Ambassador Ibra Duguène Ka of Senegal, in fulfilling this role. The convening of important international events, such as the African Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, again played an invaluable role in heightening international awareness of the question of Palestine and in achieving wider recognition in favour of the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights. Therefore, my delegation also fully associates itself with the report of the Chairman of the Committee.

The question of Palestine remains central in all efforts to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East. The inalienable rights of the Palestine people will have to be recognized and realized. The presence of nearly 4 million refugees in refugee camps in the region, living in harsh and dismal conditions, is an example of a human tragedy that can be addressed only through a comprehensive peace settlement, based on the full implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions.

To underline this point, I consider it important to recall here the words of the Secretary-General, who, in paragraph 10 of a recent report (S/1999/1175) on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, stated, *inter alia*,

"Despite the present quiet in the Israeli-Syrian sector, the situation in the Middle East continues to be potentially dangerous and is likely to remain so, unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached."

The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum between Palestine and Israel was a welcome breakthrough in the stalled peace process. It is the sincere hope of my delegation that the spirit of cooperation in which the agreement was reached will contribute to the full implementation of previous accords reached between the parties. The parties have now embarked on the final status negotiations, and have set tight deadlines for themselves, such as a framework agreement to be reached by February 2000 and a final agreement, by

September 2000. However, with the necessary support from the international community, a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine is certainly within reach.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and express our unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): The General Assembly is considering the question of Palestine at a significant moment, as we stand on the threshold of the approaching millennium. For more than half a century, the world has borne witness to the struggle of a whole people and a whole nation for their inalienable rights, including the right to establish a sovereign and independent homeland. Indeed, no issue has preoccupied the United Nations since its inception more than the question of Palestine. It is a tragedy of momentous proportions that, while the international scene has undergone profound changes since the newly established United Nations placed this item on its agenda over five decades ago, the people of Palestine have yet to recover the inalienable rights that were unjustly taken away from them. The passage of all these years does not diminish the sacred cause of the Palestinians.

Today the Palestinian people have reached a decisive moment in their history, when the unfolding peace process could not only transform their lives and their land but also have a profound impact, in the region and beyond it. When the historic breakthrough first took place in 1993, followed by other agreements and initiatives, we fervently hoped along with the rest of the international community that lasting peace was within reach. During the past three years, however, our hopes have dissipated in the face of reneged commitments, illegal acts and transgressions. Therefore, we were gratified by the signing on 4 September 1999 by the Palestinian leaders and by Israel of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements Signed and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations. It is pertinent to note that the Memorandum touched upon some important issues, including further phased redeployment from the West Bank, phased release of Palestinian prisoners, agreement on safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the beginning of construction work on the Gaza seaport, and agreements on the city of Hebron and on security-related issues.

While acknowledging some positive developments towards the implementation of the Memorandum since its signing, such as the first phase of Israeli redeployment from the West Bank and the release of 350 Palestinian prisoners, it is crucial that the remaining matters be carried out in good faith and in accordance with the agreed timetable. Likewise, the beginning of final status negotiations is a welcome development. In this regard, my delegation has noted the commitment of the parties concerned to conclude a framework agreement in the next few months and to reach a comprehensive agreement by September 2000.

For the peace process to move decisively forward, it is essential to replace the past years of suspicion and discord with goodwill and mutual trust. For this to occur, there must be a marked change in Israeli policies with regard to situations on the ground that are in contravention of United Nations resolutions and international law and thus undermine efforts towards achieving lasting peace. Foremost among these are the expansion of settlements and the confiscation of land by the Israeli authorities in various parts of the occupied territories, especially in and around Jebel Abu Ghneim. Such unilateral actions must cease immediately, for they severely diminish the hopes and expectations generated by recent developments within the framework of the peace process.

In response to such illegal activities, the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, pursuant to the provisions of resolution ES-10/5 of 17 March 1998, was resumed for the fourth time on 5 February 1999, resulting in the convening on 15 July 1999 of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, the first in history. In this regard, it reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Cognizant of the illegality of Israel's settlement activities, the conference adjourned on the understanding that it would be reconvened should the need arise in the light of developments concerning the humanitarian situation.

Other issues that need to be urgently addressed are the question of refugees, the release of remaining prisoners, and the critical water supply situation in the territories. Despite the formidable challenges and obstacles strewn along the way, the valiant Palestinian people and its leaders have held steadfast to the path towards the achievement of stable peace. The reignited peace process should be sustained and nurtured, and trust and confidence should be fostered among the parties. To that end, it is imperative to

forge ahead with the scrupulous implementation of all peace agreements, and to demonstrate the necessary flexibility and commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, a peaceful settlement which would include the securing of justice and freedom for the Palestinian people and sovereign statehood over their lands.

For peace to flourish and grow, the parties must also surmount the decades of occupation and injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people, which have gravely undermined the socio-economic fabric of their society. In this regard, we believe that the United Nations, its agencies and the donor community have a central role to play in extending their support in the challenging tasks of nation building. We are therefore gratified by the appointment of Mr. Terje Rod Larsen as the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, to serve as the focal point of the efforts of the Organization and to maintain contact with the donor community and with non-governmental organizations in this field. Given the paramount importance of the development of the Palestinian economy, it is gratifying to note that at a meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, held on 14 and 15 October 1999 in Tokyo, a number of donors adopted a tripartite plan to expedite assistance for the implementation of essential plans. These assistance efforts are crucial if the Palestinian people are to transform their land from one of poverty and pestilence to one of prosperity and sustainable development.

In this regard, Indonesia fully supports the Bethlehem 2000 celebration. This will mark an auspicious beginning to a new era of dialogue, cooperation and reconciliation for the people of Bethlehem, and will be a significant effort to mobilize the support of the international community for the urgent cause of economic recovery for the Palestinian people. We are equally appreciative of the unstinting efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in discharging its mandate to alleviate the plight of 3.6 million Palestinian refugees by undertaking activities in a number of crucial sectors.

It was more than half a century ago that the General Assembly was seized of the question of Palestine and adopted resolution 181 (II). Throughout these long and arduous years, more time and effort has been expended on the question of Palestine than on any other international problem. Yet the aspirations of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood

have not been fulfilled. Without a shadow of doubt, the United Nations will have a permanent responsibility on the question of Palestine until a comprehensive settlement is attained based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and on international legitimacy. For its part, Indonesia has consistently maintained that a just and lasting solution to this seemingly intractable problem can be achieved only if the Palestinian people are allowed to regain their legitimate national rights, including the right of all refugees to return to their own independent homeland with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and based on the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and on the principle of land for peace.

In embracing the next millennium as the winds of peace begin to engulf the region, we fervently hope that peace will be permanently anchored in the Middle East and that its people, particularly the Palestinian people who have endured much pain and suffering for too long, will finally achieve their cherished aspirations in a homeland of their own, like all other peoples of the world.

Mr. Legwaila (Botswana): The search for peace in the Middle East continues unabated. The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians has achieved a great deal despite its interminable ups and downs and prolonged breakdowns and brinkmanship. The leaders of Palestine and Israel who, despite the deep-rooted bitterness and enmities of their shared past, have found a good measure of common ground in their quest for a just dispensation for their people, deserve our support, commendation and encouragement for their tenacity and fortitude.

But they still have a long way to go to achieve real peace for their people. The negotiations for a final settlement have just begun, and they promise to be unrelenting in their complexity, sensitivity and stubbornness. This is largely because the price of peace has never been cheap. Each side has already taken many risks and paid many prices to achieve the phenomenal progress that has culminated in the establishment of a Palestinian Authority which has given the Palestinian people, for the first time in a long time, a sense of belonging and ownership.

The choices for the Palestinians and Israelis, if there are any choices, are limited. We dare not contemplate the possibility that either side would wish to lose sight of the final objective of the peace process, which is durable peace for the State of Israel within secure borders, and peace, freedom and independence for the Palestinian people in a country they can rightly and proudly call their own.

The alternative to the realization of this objective is beyond conjecture. The failure by the two sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, not only to sustain the peace process but to give it momentum, to infuse it with a new zeal, would play into the hands of those in the area who are allergic to peaceful coexistence between Israel and its Arab neighbours. The agents of violence must not be given any quarter.

A resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would no doubt open new vistas for the quest for a comprehensive dispensation for the Middle East area as a whole. Israel and all its Arab neighbours beyond Palestine have to come to terms with one another if peace between the State of Israel and Palestine, whenever it is reached, is to have any meaning at all. The two are interlocked. There must be peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours, Lebanon, Syria and others, if peace between Israel and the Palestinians is to survive and thrive.

Peace in the area, between the Arabs and the Jews, can only come about through negotiations conducted in good faith by all concerned. The point of departure in these negotiations must of necessity involve, as a central element, the recognition and acceptance by all the parties of the ineluctable reality of one another's right to exist. The Palestinians and the State of Israel have made progress in their negotiations precisely because they have accepted each other's right to exist. They have realized that the peace of the brave is the peace they must seek for their people, not the peace of the grave. It is our hope, therefore, that there will be no more war in the Middle East as the Arab nation and the Jewish people come to realize that they are chained together by a common destiny in a common ancestral land. It is in their interest and in the interest of the entire world to ensure that those in the area who either seek change through violence or are fanatically opposed to the normalization of relations between the Arabs and the Jews — that is, the rejectionists on both sides — do not succeed in their evil designs.

Let me conclude by reiterating Botswana's unalterable support for the struggle for peace and reconciliation between the people of Israel and of Palestine. We urge them to persist in their determination to bring finality to their peace process, a finality which must, at long last, give the people of Israel a sense of security and the Palestinians a real sense of nationhood, independence, freedom and peace. May the new

millennium bring peace and tranquillity to the Middle East region as a whole.

Mr. Mwakawago (United Republic of Tanzania): Like many other delegations, my delegation would like to believe that with the advent of the new millennium the question of Palestine is about to take a turn for the better. We have seen a steady development in the last few years. All these developments — the Oslo Accords, the Madrid Peace Conference, the Wye River Memorandum, the Hebron Protocol, and the Sharm-el Sheikh Memorandum — have hopefully moved the process towards an eventual successful conclusion.

My delegation believes that the root of the problems in the Middle East is the long-standing question of Palestine. The key to a solution lies in the restoration of the legitimate and inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people. Only this can bring stability, development and a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Since the discussion on this subject at the last session of the General Assembly, the peace process has moved forward, albeit erratically. We believe that the principle of the return of land for peace as provided by Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) would bring the desired solution to the Palestinian question.

My delegation ardently believes and hopes that with the advent of the new Administration in Israel headed by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, we are going to witness a change of attitude on the part of the Israeli Government. The Administration has so far demonstrated a willingness to work towards a fair and permanent solution of the Palestinian question. This is very welcome.

As the parties prepare for the final status negotiations, my delegation would plead with them to be guided by the spirit behind the Oslo Accords, the Madrid Conference results, the Wye River Memorandum, the Hebron Protocol and the Sharm-el Sheikh Memorandum. The people of Palestine are impatient, and understandably so. But the fact that the parties are communicating is very important and needs our encouragement.

Questions have always been raised as to the role of the United Nations in the peace process. The questions of Palestine in particular and the Middle East in general have been on the agenda since the inception of the Organization. The Middle East is a very sensitive region of the world, affecting international peace and security. The United

Nations is naturally interested in what is happening in that area. Tanzania supports the United Nations involvement because it serves as an exhortation to the parties to proceed with the peace process rather than obstructing it. We believe the United Nations is competent to help and capable of helping work towards a permanent solution to the Palestinian question.

In conclusion, my delegation is optimistic that final status talks will be successful. It behooves all the parties to prepare well and proceed from the knowledge that the United Nations, through its numerous resolutions, is very keen that at long last an enduring solution be negotiated. Peace is of the essence, but it has to be based on justice. We pray that the parties will rise to the occasion and realize one of the yearnings of the people of Palestine — to have their own nation. It is our fervent hope that when we meet in September 2000 for the Millennium Summit there will be a new political dispensation in Palestine.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Agenda item 43

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/54/457, A/54/495)

Draft resolutions (A/54/L.40, A/54/L.41)

Ms. Rasi (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, Liechtenstein and Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

There is now real momentum towards peace in the Middle East. This autumn we have already witnessed two significant steps forward — the signature of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and the resumption of the final status talks between Israel and the Palestinians. These steps have created a positive atmosphere that should be further nurtured on all tracks.

The European Union welcomes both steps. The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum puts implementation of the earlier agreements back on track and provides an ambitious timetable for negotiating a permanent end to the long-standing conflict between the two peoples.

These steps required courage and determination on the part of the two leaders: Prime Minister Barak and President Arafat. The outcome was largely a result of direct negotiations between the parties. This is a significant new reality, and it bodes well for the next steps of the process.

The European Union hopes that progress on the Palestinian track will have positive effects on the Middle East as a whole. It is high time to reinvigorate the Syrian and Lebanese tracks with a view to achieving a comprehensive peace based on the principle of land for peace and the relevant Security Council resolutions. In this context we reiterate our call for urgent implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and we welcome all steps taken or planned in that regard. Regarding south Lebanon, the security of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) must be guaranteed by all parties concerned under all circumstances.

The European Union strongly supports the right of Israel to live within secure and recognized borders. We condemn in the strongest terms acts of terrorism and stress our determination to fight terrorism wherever it occurs. We urge all the parties in the peace process to do their utmost to forestall extremist actions and to deny success to extremists and others seeking to frustrate the process through provocation.

It is essential that the parties fully honour their obligations in the framework of the Madrid and Oslo processes, with a view to building mutual trust. With this in mind, the European Union calls upon the parties to avoid all unilateral acts that might prejudice the outcome of bilateral negotiations.

The European Union takes a keen interest in the Middle East as its neighbour. Peace and prosperity in the Middle East is in our own interest. During the Finnish presidency of the Union, both President Ahtisaari and Foreign Minister Halonen have visited the region. In numerous discussions with political leaders in the region both underlined the deep commitment of the European Union to the peace process and our determination and

readiness to help to search for and sustain peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Jayanama (Thailand), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The European Union will continue its efforts, in particular through its Special Envoy, Ambassador Moratinos, to help restart negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. We also reaffirm our readiness to be fully associated with the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and to contribute to the permanent status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians in accordance with the wishes of the parties.

Likewise, the European Union remains determined to help relaunch as soon as possible the multilateral track of the peace process. We hope that all regional parties will soon be ready to engage in reinvigorating the Regional Economic Development Working Group. The European Union, as the gavel-holder, attaches great importance to furthering regional economic ties. Regional cooperation is not a favour to anyone, but a mutual interest.

Recognizing the importance of a sound economy to social and political stability, the European Union will continue its considerable economic and technical assistance to the region and will seek to make progress towards its vision of a Euro-Mediterranean area of shared prosperity and free trade.

In conclusion, the European Union would like to reiterate its firm commitment to the peace process based on the principles enshrined in the relevant Security Council resolutions. The European Union has a lot to offer and is willing to play its full part in order to contribute to a peaceful and prosperous future in the Middle East.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (spoke in Arabic): Eager to ensure a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, as well as security and stability in the Middle East, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has supported the peace process from the beginning. Our support will continue, convinced as we are that peace is a strategic choice.

The Government of my country supports the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum recently signed between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, which defines the terms of the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum.

We would request the new Israeli Government to revive the peace process on all tracks and to respect the commitments undertaken, on the basis of which the peace process was founded at the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference: Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) the principle of land for peace and the complete unconditional withdrawal from the territories occupied in the Golan Heights to the lines of 4 June 1967. We urge Israel to abstain from its repeated attacks on the independence and sovereignty of the Lebanese territories and demand that it immediately and unconditionally withdraw from southern Lebanon and western Beka'a, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

In harmony with the common Arab position, expressed by the Council of the League of Arab States at its 101st session, that all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons should be removed from our critical region, we are interested in the efforts to make the Middle East a region free of weapons of mass destruction. We must also stress that Israel is the only State in the region that refuses to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, although it is the only one to possess such weapons. We hope that the peace process will be successful and invite Israel to accede to the Treaty and to help make the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction of all kinds.

The United Nations and its Member States have accorded considerable importance to the Middle East and have placed this item on the agenda of the General Assembly at all its sessions. At the most recent session, in particular, the General Assembly urged all parties directly concerned to consider seriously the steps required for the implementation of the proposal to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, and, as a means of promoting this objective, invited the countries concerned to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It also called upon the countries of the region that have not done so, pending the establishment of the zone, to agree to place all their nuclear activities under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. The Assembly noted the importance of the ongoing bilateral Middle East peace negotiations in promoting mutual confidence. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hopes that the international community, through its member States, will succeed in achieving the ideal goal of creating a region free of weapons of mass destruction.

Despite a slight improvement in relations with the Iranian Government, the problem of Iran's occupation of

the United Arab Emirates islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa has persisted, despite the bilateral contacts between those two countries since the new Government took power in Iran. We hope that Iran will adopt a new policy for dealing with the situation that has emerged in the Gulf region and that serious negotiations with the Emirates on this matter will begin, including an agreement to submit the case to the International Court of Justice if negotiations should fail. If an agreement is reached, it will undoubtedly open a new chapter in relations between Iran and the countries of the Gulf, strengthening peace and stability in the Gulf region and in the Middle East as a whole.

My country still totally condemns the 1990 Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. We continue to ask the Iraqi Government to respect all the resolutions adopted by the Security Council following the occupation of Kuwait. At the same time, we cannot forget the suffering of the Iraqi people under the economic sanctions in effect for eight years, which do not appear as if they were about to be lifted any time soon unless the basis on which they are applied should change. We also support the position of certain permanent members of the Security Council in favour of lifting some sanctions on Iraqi transactions with the outside world so that the import of food, medicine and other necessities may be possible. We further support the creation of a new system of inspection of weapons of mass destruction.

The countries of the Middle East must raise the standard of living of their peoples and ensure their position in international markets in accordance with the challenges of globalization, which has begun to govern world economic trends. For these and other reasons, the countries of my region need peace, stability and confidence so that they can devote their natural resources to the needs of their peoples. This is not impossible if the countries of the region succeed in cooperating with the international community in resolving the problems that I have mentioned.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): The United States continues to support a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. We will do everything we can to assist the parties to reach a negotiated agreement which will resolve their differences.

The situation in the Middle East has changed significantly since the last session of the General Assembly. The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum sets out a timetable for future progress in the peace process.

Progress has already been made. The safe passage route between Gaza and the West Bank is operating. The Gaza sea port has been approved. Further redeployments have been carried out. Additional prisoners have been released, and the parties have begun talks on a framework agreement for permanent status.

Despite these positive developments in the peace process, negotiations on the text of a draft resolution supporting the process were unsuccessful. My Government regrets that the General Assembly has thus been deprived of the opportunity to take official notice of the progress already made and express its support and encouragement as this historic attempt to resolve the long-standing Arab-Israeli dispute through peaceful negotiations continues.

My Government would like to express its gratitude to the sponsors of the draft resolution on the Middle East peace process, the Russian Federation and Norway, for their tireless and dedicated efforts to reach agreement on a text.

The draft resolution entitled "The Syrian Golan" (A/54/L.41), like so many of the other resolutions dealing with the Arab-Israeli dispute, seeks to interject the General Assembly into negotiations. Syria and Israel have both publicly supported the principle of a negotiating process to resolve their differences, and draft resolutions such as this do not contribute to that goal. The United States will abstain in the voting on the draft resolution on Jerusalem, consistent with our belief that the future of Jerusalem should be decided through permanent status negotiations.

Mr. Jasmi (Malaysia): In May this year the five-year period for a final settlement under the Oslo accords lapsed, with peace still not yet in sight. The question of Palestine, which is the core issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict, has yet to reach its final and peaceful settlement. There was a deadlock in the peace process as the implementation of the Wye River agreement was unilaterally suspended by former Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. The little progress made with regard to the implementation of the agreements negotiated dampened the prospects of an early resolution of the Palestinian issue and prolonged the agony of the people living under Israeli occupation in the occupied territories. A just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine is the only way towards the attainment of lasting peace in the region.

Regrettably, there has not been much progress either in the other, related issues in the Middle East. My delegation is deeply concerned that the peace talks between

Syria and Israel, suspended in 1996, have not been resumed since. There should be an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Israeli forces from southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan Heights, as called for by Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 338 (1973). The renewal by the Security Council earlier this month of the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) reminds us of the still tense situation between the two countries. My delegation is deeply concerned that while there are no serious incidents, the situation remains dangerous and potentially volatile. My delegation shares the observation the Secretary-General makes in his report, that

"Despite the present quiet in the Israeli-Syrian sector, the situation in the Middle East continues to be potentially dangerous and is likely to remain so, unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached." (*S/1999/1175, para. 10*)

We call on the parties concerned to revive the stalled peace process to bring about a comprehensive peace settlement as soon as possible. The continued occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel constitutes another major stumbling block in the way of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

There has been no change in the situation between Lebanon and Israel. After 20 years, Israel's occupation forces still remain in south Lebanon, in spite of Security Council resolutions calling for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon. Reports from Security Council field operations regarding recent clashes between the Israeli Defence Forces and armed elements, which have resulted in civilian injuries and damage to property in the area, attest to the volatile security situation there. We call on the new Israeli Government to make good its intention to withdraw its forces from Lebanon as soon as possible.

There are, however, some glimmers of hope that some progress could be made to further the peace process. The initial steps taken in the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements and the time-frame agreed on to achieve final settlement, by September 2000, bring with them a cautious optimism that the peace process is back on track. The issues that remain to be resolved are difficult and sensitive, and there may be some who would like to derail the process. My delegation calls on all parties concerned to refrain from activities which prejudice the outcome of the final status

negotiations and from any activity contrary to international laws, including settlement activities. We are particularly concerned about the negative impact of the settlements issue on the progress of the negotiations at this critical juncture.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, the new United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, who is also the Secretary-General's Personal Representative to the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and to wish him well in continuing the good work of coordinating United Nations and international assistance to the Palestinian people. We also wish to commend the men and women who have served well with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and UNDOF for their courageous work in a difficult and often dangerous environment, risking life and limb for the cause of international peace and security.

Malaysia is of the firm conviction that security for all countries in the Middle East can be assured only through the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. This should be based on the principle of the exchange of land for peace and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

As stated yesterday by the Secretary-General in his message on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, "The peace process has now entered a phase that is at once its most promising and its most difficult." The international community must not miss this window of opportunity to finally bring about peace and stability in the Middle East region and to allow the people there to begin the new millennium in an environment of peace and stability.

Mr. Abdullahi (Nigeria): I wish to express the gratitude of the Nigerian delegation to the Secretary-General for his report on the situation in the Middle East. The crisis in that area has been the most protracted and difficult conflict facing the international community for a very long time. Happily, significant progress has been recorded in this decade. The various initiatives and efforts, such as the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, the 1991 Oslo accord, the 1998 Wye River Memorandum and other agreements, manifestly show that when there is political will and commitment on the part of all the parties, significant steps toward lasting peace are possible.

In spite of intermittent setbacks in the peace process, we are encouraged by the willingness and, indeed, the determination of some of the parties to remain engaged in dialogue, discussion and negotiations. In this connection, we welcome all the efforts that have been made by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to reduce tension and move towards permanent peace. The Oslo tripartite summit early this month has certainly given a fresh impetus to this process.

We are only 10 months away from the destination of a long journey which began over 50 years ago. Undoubtedly, we are all anxious and eager to attain this very important goal. All members of the international community have a responsibility to support the peace process. Our duty is therefore to continuously encourage all the parties to reach an agreement that will bring peace, security and stability to that region.

The geography and the history of the region make it imperative for a peaceful resolution of the dispute between Israel and other parties. This is the surest way of ensuring that the peace accord between the Israelis and the Palestinians will have the desired effect of easing tension in that region. It is only in an atmosphere of peace and stability that economic development, and in particular trade and investment, can flourish. It is therefore essential to remind all the parties that peace is neither divisible nor can it be compartmentalized.

The Nigerian delegation believes that the time has certainly come for other parties in the region to return to the negotiating table. In this regard, Nigeria calls on all States in the region to shed the use of force as a means of resolving disputes. Furthermore, we strongly urge all the parties to deploy their best efforts towards peace so that at the beginning of the new millennium, the peoples of a region that has not known peace for a long time can at last put the hostilities and bitterness of the past behind them.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Egypt, who will introduce draft resolutions A/54/L.40 and A/54/L.41.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt)(spoke in Arabic): In my statement before the General Assembly yesterday, I presented the basic elements of my country's position with regard to the question of Palestine and the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating track in the peace process. Today, I would like to present the basic elements of

Egypt's position with regard to the Middle East peace process in general and to other related topics.

If, as I mentioned yesterday, Egypt considers the question of Palestine as the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the key to the establishment of a lasting peace in the Middle East, it also believes that the achievement of a comprehensive peace in the area should be based on equally important elements: first, a total Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including East Jerusalem; secondly, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza; thirdly, the establishment of mutual and equitable security measures; fourthly, the establishment of normal, neighbourly relations between the Arab parties concerned and Israel. Until a settlement including all these elements is achieved, Israel must refrain from taking any unilateral action on the ground. Here I specifically mean all settler activities that run counter to international law and United Nations resolutions or that abort the negotiations and void them of their content.

Arab participation in the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference and in the subsequent steps towards in the entire peace process was based on Security Council resolution 242 (1967), as the main axis of the negotiating process in all its tracks. In this respect, I would like to recall that the peace that Egypt established with Israel more than 20 years ago was based on the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967); it has thus set a basic precedent for the achievement of a peaceful settlement between the Arab parties concerned and Israel. Therefore, our position is based on that peace and is as follows: first, there must be a total withdrawal from all territories that were occupied by force in 1967; secondly, these territories must be cleared of any Israeli settlements; thirdly, mutual security measures with the agreement of both parties must be established; and fourthly, normal relations between the two States concerned must be established. These are the foundations that constitute the so-called land for peace formula, which Egypt believes must be applied to the peaceful settlement between Israel and any concerned Arab party. In this regard, we would like to reiterate that Security Council resolution 242 (1967) must be implemented as an indivisible whole and not piecemeal. The claims that we hear every now and then about the application of this resolution to some tracks and not to others, to certain Arab territories and not to others, are all based on an illegality that lacks the benefit of a sound understanding of the resolution, which does not distinguish either in letter or in spirit among the territories occupied by Israel by force in 1967. Territories occupied

by force should be evacuated. This is the principle enshrined in the Charter and is the principle applied by the United Nations since its inception.

In relation to the Syrian track of the peace process, and contrary to the hopes we all had when the new Government took over in Israel last July, we find that the Israeli side still resists recognition of the important progress achieved in the negotiations between Syria and Israel up to 1995 in a manner that hinders the resumption of negotiations on this track. Here I would like to reiterate our firm position in support of Syria's full right to regain its occupied territories in their entirety, which is the only way to establish peace between Syria and Israel.

With regard to the Lebanese track, Egypt reiterates its support of the Lebanese position regarding the necessity for Israel to implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978) fully and unconditionally. We are confident that an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and western Bekaa will represent the first step on the road to enhancing confidence, reducing tensions, achieving more stability and even establishing peace between Lebanon and Israel within the framework of a comprehensive peace in the region.

I should like here to speak of Egypt's vision of a comprehensive peace in the region, which involves the element of security. Egypt believes that the establishment of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East is the genuine basis for comprehensive security in the interest of all the parties in the region. It should be clear that the security we seek in the Middle East is the security of all parties, not the security of one party or the other at the expense of the security of the rest. Comprehensive security is the only genuine equivalent of comprehensive peace.

Proceeding from this premise, Egypt continues to call for the removal of all nuclear weapons from the Middle East. Since 1990, within the framework of the initiative of President Mubarak, we have called for the establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. In this context, may I recall the continued Israeli refusal to take any measures or actions that would enhance confidence in the area of inspection of its nuclear facilities, another element that adds to political and even military tension in a region that already suffers from a high degree of tension and lack of confidence.

The link between the establishment of a comprehensive, just and durable peace, on the one hand, and the promotion of equitable regional cooperation in the interest of all States of the region, on the other, is an organic link that cannot be severed. Egypt relates all movement on the bilateral negotiating tracks to the possibility of progress in realizing regional cooperation in all its aspects and on all its tracks.

A concept of peace in the Middle East is a whole that cannot be fragmented, and there is no doubt that a relaxation of tensions on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks would enhance the opportunity for more activity by all parties in the Middle East. Therefore, we hope that the peace process will witness genuine positive developments that could lead to regional cooperation based on the genuine requirements of the States of the region within common areas of interest.

The establishment of peace in the Middle East requires the coordination of all efforts by all parties in the region and by peace-loving States from other regions. In this connection, I wish to express, on behalf of Egypt, our appreciation for the positive role played by the United States, the members of the European Union and other States in the enhancement and activation of the peace process.

Egypt looks forward to an imminent and successful conclusion of the peace process that will enable all the States of the region, including the emerging State of Palestine, to realize the hopes and aspirations of their peoples for social and economic development within a framework of security, good-neighbourliness and mutual respect in a manner that provides the region with a better future and that enables it to regain its leadership role in the service of humanity.

Before concluding, I wish to introduce the two draft resolutions contained in documents A/54/L.40 and A/54/L.41, submitted under agenda item 43, on the situation in the Middle East.

Draft resolution A/54/L.40 is entitled "Jerusalem", and I am introducing it on behalf of Egypt and the other sponsors: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, the Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Palestine. This draft resolution, like last year's, includes three preambular paragraphs and four operative paragraphs. In the first preambular paragraph,

the General Assembly, having considered the item entitled "The situation in the Middle East" would recall the various resolutions adopted from 1981 until last year that stipulate the illegality and illegitimacy of all measures taken by Israel in Jerusalem.

The second preambular paragraph recalls Security Council resolution 478 (1980), in which the Security Council determined that the "Basic Law" on Jerusalem and the proclamation of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel were null and void and must be rescinded forthwith and called upon all States that had established diplomatic missions at Jerusalem to withdraw such missions.

Operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution determines that the decision of Israel to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem is illegal and therefore null and void.

Operative paragraph 2 deplores the transfer by some States of their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem in violation of Security Council resolution 478 (1980), which I mentioned a while ago.

Operative paragraph 3 calls once more on those States to abide by the provisions of the relevant United Nations resolutions, in conformity with their obligations to the Charter of the United Nations.

The last operative paragraph requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on the implementation of the resolution.

I would now like to turn to the draft resolution entitled "The Syrian Golan" (A/54/L.41), which I would like to introduce on behalf of Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Palestine.

The third preambular paragraph recalls Security Council resolution 497 (1981), in which the Council rejected the illegal annexation of the Syrian Golan by Israel. The fourth preambular paragraph reaffirms the fundamental Charter principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and the fifth reaffirms once more the applicability of the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War to the occupied Syrian Golan.

The sixth preambular paragraph states the Assembly's deep concern that Israel has not withdrawn from the Syrian Golan, which has been under occupation since 1967, and the seventh stresses the illegality of the Israeli settlement construction and activities in the occupied Syrian Golan.

The eighth preambular paragraph notes with satisfaction the convening at Madrid in 1991 of the Peace Conference on the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the formula of land for peace, which is the core of the peace process.

The last preambular paragraph expresses the Assembly's grave concern over the halt in the peace process on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and the hope that peace talks will soon resume from the point they had reached.

Operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution declares that Israel has failed so far to comply with Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

Operative paragraph 2 declares also that the Israeli decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan is null and void and has no validity whatsoever and calls upon Israel to rescind it.

Operative paragraph 3 reaffirms the Assembly's determination that all relevant provisions of the Regulations annexed to the Hague Convention of 1907 and the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War continue to apply to the Syrian territory occupied by Israel.

Operative paragraph 4 determines once more that the continued occupation of the Syrian Golan constitutes a stumbling block in the way of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. Operative paragraphs 5 and 6 call upon Israel to resume talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and to respect the commitments and undertakings reached during the previous talks.

Operative paragraph 7 calls upon all the parties concerned, the co-sponsors of the peace process and the entire international community to exert all the necessary efforts to ensure the resumption of the peace process and its success.

The last operative paragraph requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on the implementation of the resolution.

In conclusion, I would like to introduce these two draft resolutions to the General Assembly on behalf of the sponsoring States and to call on all delegations to vote in favour of them, for they reaffirm the basic principles contained in the United Nations Charter and call for the achievement of justice.

Mr. Al-Awdi (Kuwait) (spoke in Arabic): On the eve of the third millennium, my delegation looks forward not only to working to prepare for the advent of the twenty-first century, but also to prepare for the celebration to follow the reaching of a final solution to one of the thorniest conflicts of the twentieth century, namely, the Arab-Israeli conflict, whose ramifications still hang over us.

Proceeding from a genuine Arab and Islamic spirit, the State of Kuwait will always support the constant calls by Arabs to reach a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East on the basis of internationally binding resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Based on this premise, my delegation wishes to reaffirm the following.

First, we welcome the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, signed early in September last, between the Palestinian National Authority and the Israeli Administration as a positive step on the right track. It should be completed by the new Israeli Administration by returning to the framework and principles adopted by the Madrid Peace Conference and the resumption of the negotiations on all tracks. This will lead to the restoration of all the legitimate rights of the Arabs and the implementation of all internationally binding resolutions in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace.

Secondly, Kuwait is following with keen interest the delicate negotiations currently under way between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Administration concerning a final settlement. In this respect, we strongly support the call to the Israeli Administration to cease forthwith all its unilateral measures aimed at changing the demographic composition of Jerusalem, which contravene all norms of international law and internationally binding resolutions. Israel should also put an immediate end to all its illegal settlement policies, especially the appropriation of occupied land in Jerusalem.

We also call on Israel to respect the demand of the Palestinian people to preserve East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state and their right to return to their homeland in accordance with paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We also reject all Israeli attempts to disseminate the idea of settling the refugees away from their homeland.

We also call on Israel to withdraw completely from all the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 in implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and we look forward to a final resolution of the issue on the agreed date, 21 September 2000.

Thirdly, we in Kuwait are even more deeply concerned because the negotiations on both the Syrian and Lebanese tracks have been derailed and because Israel has reneged on all the agreements reached during the most recent phase of negotiations. The only solution that can lead to a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is a complete and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Arab Golan Heights, to the line of 4 June 1967, as well as from southern Lebanon and western Bekaa, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978).

Kuwait calls on Israel to cease its repeated acts of aggression against Lebanon and its independence — fraternal Lebanon, which we hold in high esteem. We support our brethren in Lebanon in their development efforts so that Beirut, the cultural capital of the Middle East for 1999, can regain its glory as an enlightened cultural centre.

Fourthly, Kuwait highly appreciates the role played by the co-sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East, especially that of the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, as well as that of the European Union. We hope that those parties will continue to support the peace process at all levels.

Yesterday, the twentieth session of the Gulf Cooperation Council ended its work in Riyadh. The elements I have mentioned were made crystal-clear at that session. We also associate ourselves with our leaders in this respect, and we hope that next year will bring about the achievement of our peoples' aspirations to a just and comprehensive peace in the area, and that Israel will move from words to concrete and positive deeds.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.